

PRO
WRESTLING
TORCH



YEARBOOK
1988

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

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INTRODUCTION

When Dave Meltzer introduces his yearbook (1987 Best of the Wrestling Observer) he talks about a trip to Japan where he and a friend ran into a Japanese sportswriter who upon meeting Dave labeled him the "World Champion of sports writers"...

Well, the following story is what it is like from the other side... my side...

I was recently at a WWF card at the Met Center. At every Twin Cities card there is this guy who sits in the front row. You can count on him being there shouting everything at every wrestler that he has found out about in The Wrestling Observer. He gets a kick out of trying to get a reaction out of the wrestlers.

I had talked to him at previous cards, and even showed him my newsletter, but he showed little interest and said that his Observer was enough.

Not being the type to give up easily, I approached him at last month's card. He was sitting about five seats from me, so it seemed convenient to give it another try during the intermission.

I walked up to him and said to him, "So when are you going to start subscribing to two newsletters?"

He said, "Which one?"

I coincidentally had a copy of the latest Torch in my hands and showed it to him. He didn't look impressed and said to me, "This is that one based here in The Cities, isn't it?"

A friend of his sitting next to him asked him who did it and he said something to the effect, "Wade Keller or something...". He then drifted his conversation back to me and after looking at the pages for at most fifteen seconds, he told me, "You know this Wade Keller character just takes stuff from Meltzer", handed the newsletter back to me, and asked, "Why do you subscribe?"

I felt I should defend myself, but still have fun and keep my true identity hidden. I told him that Keller was a good writer and that Mick Karch, Ray Whebbe, and Mr. Mike did regular columns for it.

He didn't hear me as our conversation was interrupted by another person walking up to him. I went back to my seat where people knew who I was and didn't call me "character". My friends got a kick out of the story. I had never talked about myself behind my very own back before and it was kind of fun. But the story doesn't end there.

Our conversation must have fascinated him, because after the card was over, he walked up to me and inquired, "So what do you think about this Wade Keller bullshit?"

Trying to contain my laughter, I asked what he meant.

He said, "Well what does he offer that Meltzer doesn't?"

I explained that this Keller character gave an alternate opinion along with stuff besides news. I also mentioned that I, I mean that Keller character, covered the PWA and AWA indepthly.

He said, "Who cares about that stuff. The PWA is boring. It's just a side-show circus (and here is a guy at a WWF card calling something else a "circus"!). Who wrestles for that PWA?"

Just then a friend says, "Hey Wade, don't forget your coat." (yea, it's six below zero and I'm gonna forget my coat). Well, I leaned over and told my friend not to call me by my real name, and that I'd explain later. So he says, "Hey John, don't forget your coat."

I turned back and at the urging of an usher, my new acquaintance had made his way down the aisle. The conversation was over, but that was the true highlight of the card. I wanted to continue trying to convince him that The Torch isn't a photocopy of The Observer with a photo on the cover. Then if it seemed appropriate I could have pulled out my drivers' license and had him see my face and name. The look on his face would have been a classic, but no such luck.

Oh well, it made for good humor in telling others. And there is no doubt that he'll be back next month shouting real names of wrestlers, shouting "Where's Pat Patterson" to Steve Lombardi, and "Hey Robert (Gibson), Turner's offering 40 cents on the dollar on the balloon payments if you go back to him!"...

That's what it's like on my side of the newsletter business. That's the kind of respect I get. Oh well, I guess conversations like that keep my "alleged" ego in line.

On that note let's move on to the first ever Pro Wrestling Torch Yearbook 1988. I don't know how I got into doing this as the purpose of the mid-year annual was so I didn't have to put a yearbook together. But, I couldn't resist putting another ballot in your hand and another yearbook in your mailbox.

I would like to thank all of you who took the time in this hectic holiday season to fill out the ballot and contribute predictions, unofficial awards, and memories. I think the yearbook has turned out great and will prove to be interesting and informative.

The photo on the cover is of Jerry "The King" Lawler who proved to be one of the major characters in 1988's script. It was taken at the Met Sports Center at the AWA's Superclash Showcase card on November 26, 1988. He was on his way to defeating Wahoo McDaniel in an AWA Title defense.

As we enter 1989, it looks like 1989 will be very eventful. One year from now when the 1989 Yearbook is being published, a lot of intriguing and surprising things will have happened and a lot of questions about the future of wrestling will have been answered. 1989 is going to lay out the game board for the 1990's.

So lean back and enjoy this look back at 1988 and look ahead to 1989. Thanks for reading! ***

Nineteen-Hundred and Eighty-Eight witnessed many events in pro wrestling. Some events entertained us, others infuriated us, while still others bored us. In any case, there is a lot to remember and recall from this year. The Torch's "Eyewitness 88" takes a look at some of the events that 88 will be remembered for. So, on that note, let's move on to "Eyewitness 88", The Pro Wrestling Torch's look at the year, 1988...

SLAP ME ONCE, SHAME ON ME. SLAP ME TWICE, SHAME ON YOU

For the last half of 1987, Rick Steiner put up with the "Games Master" Kevin Sullivan slapping him, insulting him, making fun of him, and degrading him. After much fan's encouraging, Steiner turned on Sullivan and became a babyface. Steiner waged war against Mike Rotunda and at Starrcade he defeated Rotunda to become the NWA World TV Champion. Steiner is a true talent both in ring-skill and in working a crowd. He is the NWA's hottest babyface and will finish the year headlining against Ric Flair for the NWA Title.

AFTER MIDNIGHT, DUSTY SEES THE LIGHT

It didn't take long for good ol' Dusty Rhodes to realize that if you play "hide and seek" under the same mask more than once or twice in a lifetime, most will catch on and know who's hiding. The Midnight Rider didn't last long as he came and went after a three or four week visit. The incident where he hit promoter Jim Crockett was forgotten. His feud against Tully Blanchard and JJ Dillon for hitting Magnum TA was soon scraped, and he was on his way to finishing his last year as booker for the NWA.

I'LL GO HERE, I'LL GO THERE, I TRY TO GO EVERYWHERE

Tom Zenk shocked the wrestling world when he quit the WWF and The Can-Am Connection in the midst of a major push in mid-1987. He arrived fresh in the AWA in January of 1988. Everyone looked forward to a great Zenk-Hennig feud over the AWA Title. Before that could happen, however, he left. Instead of him getting title shots, Greg Gagne was getting all the title shots. Zenk was stuck wrestling Billy Robinson to draws. He entered the PWA and began an anti-AWA interview tirade. Soon, however, Billy Jack Haynes showed interest in bringing in Zenk to be part of his new promotion. Zenk headed to the Pacific Northwest territory, but ended up on Don Owen's payroll, not Billy Jack's. That lasted all of a week, and Zenk was back in the Twin Cities and wrestling for the PWA again. He struck a deal with All-Japan and wrestled several tours of Japan with PWA filling the gap. But let us forget the European tour that he went on, but didn't finish. Oh well. He's now touring Japan regularly, wrestling occasionally for the PWA and working full-time as a security guard.

BATTLE OF THE MIDNIGHTS--PART ONE AND TWO

We all know as we left 1988, there was a hot feud between The Midnight Express (C) and The Original Midnight Express (D). However, we also entered 1988 with a Midnight-Midnight feud. In the AWA, The Original Midnight Express formed under the management of Paul E. Dangerously and quickly took the AWA Tag Titles from Bill Dundee and Jerry Lawler. The Midnight Rockers also re-signed with the AWA, and battled The Midnight Express to regain the belts that were once theirs. They did, and The Express moved on to bigger and better things. The Dangerously and Cornette feud between their two teams is currently creating great matches and great interest in the NWA.

HE LOST IT, HE WON IT, HE BOUGHT IT, THEY ALL WANT IT

Hulk Hogan's era as WWF champion ended in February. Hulk was pinned thanks to an unfair count by an evil twin referee, one of the Hebners. Andre the Giant was the winner and the first man to pin Hulk Hogan in years. Andre fulfilled his agreement and immediately sold the title to Ted DiBiase. DiBiase bought the title and wore the belt proudly (?) for several days. Jack Tunney then held up the title since the WWF title can not be bought or sold. Wrestlemania decided who the new champion was. Randy Savage defeated Ted DiBiase in the finals of the Wrestlemania IV tournament to start a new era-- the era of "The Macho Man". Randy Savage's power as champion surprised many. His drawing power allowed McMahon to headline Hogan (upon his return) on one card, while Savage defended in another city on the same night. It has proven to be a powerful combination, yet seems in jeopardy as a turn by one of the two may be coming in time for Wrestlemania V.

OH WHERE, OH WHERE, HAS MY LITTLE DOG GONE?... IS THAT HIM IN ATLANTA?

The Islanders stole The Bulldog Matilda. Matilda was the latest in a line of mascots in the WWF. The British Bulldogs had lost their dog to some savage Islanders. This resulted in an angry Jack Tunney, a weeping Dynamite Kid, a search for Matilda, a recovered but sick Matilda, a get-well letter campaign for Matilda, a feud between The British Bulldogs and The Islanders, and Bobby Heenan in a ridiculous outfit for his match in Wrestlemania. Then The Bulldogs left the WWF and went to Calgary Stampede, without Matilda.

But K-9 mascots weren't history, as Rick Steiner showed up with a dog sometimes called "Spike", beginning a whole new chapter in the NWA. Don't you think it'll be a little tough to make it through 1989 without Spike getting "doggnapped"?

THEY WERE HERE JANUARY 1ST, BUT WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Blackbird	...He's Iceman Parsons again
The Angel of Death	...He's Russian Assassin #1
Jack Victory	...He's The Russian Assassin #2
Paul Orndorff	...He retired, he didn't die
Nick Kiniski	...He's still mad at Verne
Owen Hart	...He's now The Blue Blazer
One Man Gang	...He's now The African Dream, Akeem
Terry Taylor	...He's now The Little Red Rooster
The Prince	...He's Brickhouse Brown again
Wendell Cooley	...He became Rick Casey
Rick Casey	...He's Wendell Cooley again
Big Bubba Rogers	...He's The Big Bossman
Shaska Whatley	...He's Willie B. Hert
The Shepherders	...They're The Bushwackers
Mr. Olympia	...He's Jerry Stubbs again
Butch Reed	...He's Heading to the NWA
Bad News Allen	...He's Bad News Brown
Boy Tony	...He's Cowboy Tony
The Zodiac	...He's Barry Orton
Bruce Pritchard	...He's Brother Love
Jose Louis Rivera	...He's Conquistadore #1
Jose Estrada	...He's Conquistadore #2
David Crockett	...He's still David Crockett

FAREWELL TO THE MINNEAPOLIS AUDITORIUM

The old Minneapolis Auditorium saw its last card in February. Many old-timers were invited to this "legendary night" to sign autographs before the card began including Hardboiled Haggerty, Butch Levy, Verne Gagne, Larry Hennig, Red Bastien, Leo Nomolini, Dick the Bruiser, Billy Robinson, and Kenny Jay. The results saw Ricky Rice pin JT Spider, Ray Stevens pinned Soldat Ustinov, Tom Zenk fought Billy Robinson to a time limit draw, Wahoo McDaniel and Baron Von Raschke beat The Nasty Boys, Dick the Bruiser defeated Sheik Adnan El Kaissie via DQ, The Midnight Rockers successfully defended their tag team titles against Kevin Kelly and Mr Go (Steve O, subbing for Nick Kiniski who allegedly quit partly because Gene Kiniski, his father, wasn't invited to the "Legendary Night")), and the main event saw Greg Gagne pin "Cool" Curt Hennig in a non-title cage match. The AWA was without a home and didn't return with a card in the Twin Cities until "Superclash Showcase" in November.

WRESTLING RETURNS TO PRIME TIME NETWORK TV

The WWF made quite an accomplishment in getting a one-hour prime time network special. They headlined the show with Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant. On network TV Hogan lost his coveted World Title to Andre the Giant who held it less than thirty seconds. Ted DiBiase didn't waste time in buying the belt from Andre. The twin referee angle went down as one of the most original of the year and the Hebners replaced Tommy Young and Danny Davis as the most well-known referees in the business. The idea of pro wrestling on network prime time became a norm as they are scheduled for another special in February, 1989.

OREGON WARFARE LEADS TO COOPERATION

After leaving the WWF due to reported health problems which kept him from fulfilling the Titan schedule, he formed his own promotion in Oregon called the OWF. The Oregon Wrestling Federation seemed to be headed in the right direction, and it may have been successful had there been fans to support the group. The OWF folded months later and Don Owen's PNW group was without competition again. As we enter 1989, Mel Saraceno has decided to start the Pacific Coast Wrestling Federation which will try to correct the mistakes Billy Jack made. Don Owens looks to be headed to

more competition in 1989. However, Don Owens enlisted in the aid of Ted Turner's NWA. As 1988 comes to a close, cooperation between Owens and Turner is strong. If Saraceno's PCWF plans to go head-to-head with Owens and the NWA, he will have his work cut out for him. If both can peacefully co-exist, then more power to them.

BLACKMAIL IN PRO WRESTLING?

In January Baby Doll claimed to have some incriminating photos of Dusty Rhodes and she and Larry Zbyszko planned to blackmail "The American Dream". Well, a week or two later, Dusty decided he didn't like the angle and claimed he didn't care about anything Baby Doll had because he hadn't done anything wrong. About the only thing that came out of that angle was a subject for a "Hot News".

WORLD, WORLD, ANOTHER CHAMPION OF THE WORLD?

Bob Geigel thought the key to success in Kansas City would be a change in name and a new title, thus Central States wrestling turned into the WWA. The World Wrestling Alliance held a tournament in February to decide on a new World Champion since they were separating officially from the NWA. The not exactly well-known, charismatic, superstar Mike George won the tournament. The crowds stayed low, as did the payoffs throughout the year.

CONTINENTAL SPLITS-UP...

CONTINENTAL MAKES-UP... CONTINENTAL DIES?

Continental Championship Wrestling broke up into the Continental Wrestling Federation and USA Wrestling. The CWF had a highly successful year up until the end. USA had an up and down year with such stars as Doug Furnas, The Bullet, The Nightmares, and The Riches headlining. However, the group was absorbed back into the CWF, re-aligning the two groups into one. The CWF's success in the bulk of the year can be attributed to Eddie Gilbert's and Paul E. Dangerously's influence. Gilbert and Dangerously found their way to the NWA leaving The Bullet as the booker in a deflated CWF territory. As the year comes to a close, the existence of CWF may be in jeopardy.

I'M A HORSEMAN, YOU'RE A HORSEMAN, WOULDNT YOU RATHER BE A BRAIN BUSTER

First former Horseman Lex Luger feuds with The Four Horsemen, namely Tully Blanchard, Arn Anderson, and Ric Flair. He called on Ole Anderson, another former Horseman, for some help. Lex ended up teaming with Barry Windham. They were dubbed The Twin Towers and defeated two of The Horsemen, Tully and Arn, for the NWA World Tag Team Titles. However, Windham decided being Horseman would be more profitable than being champions with Lex Luger. So, in a tag team title defense against Tully and Arn, Windham attacked Luger leading to a Horseman victory. Barry, Tully, Arn, and Flair made The Horseman stronger than ever. However, late in 1988, Tully and Arn were lured to the WWF and became The Brainbusters. Now The Horsemen are only Ric Flair and Barry Windham, still strong, yet only two.

THE BATTLE OF THE SUPERCARDS IN MARCH

Almost as meaningful as The Battle of Thanksgiving, Wrestlemania IV went head-to-head with The Clash of the Champions I. The NWA came out ahead in quality of matches and overall card. The NWA had more viewers than the WWF did, although their show was free. The WWF lost a lot of money because of the NWA's interference. After this card, it seemed the head-to-head mega-event battles were over.

I DON'T LIKE VERNE AND I'M GOING TO TELL THE WORLD

That seemed to be Paul "I Hate the AWA and Verne Gagne" Dangerously's preoccupation in the middle of the year. He vehemently spoke against the AWA on his Pro Wrestling This Week "Danger Zone" segments. He called the AWA a "Mickey Mouse" organization and acted like their World Tag Team Titles meant nothing. Paul "I Hate the AWA and Verne Gagne" Dangerously slowly regressed back into Paul E. Dangerously and ended the year happily in the NWA.

SIGN OF STINGS TO COME

When Sting took Ric Flair to a forty-five minute draw at The Clash of the Champions, he proved he was a future superstar. Sting didn't win the World Title, or any title for that matter through December, but he proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he will be World Champion some day. He has surpassed many fellow bodybuilders in that he is a great wrestler with tremendous natural ability and charisma to match. A big part of the future of wrestling includes Sting.

ONE CHAMPION ELIMINATES A KING, THE OTHER FALLS TO ONE

While "The King" Harley Race faced life-threatening intestinal problems, the WWF developed a story that credited Hulk Hogan with his departure. The WWF claimed that Hogan injured Race on a Saturday Nights Main Event, causing him to retire.

About a month later, Jerry "The King" Lawler defeated Curt Hennig for the AWA World Title in Memphis. Jerry promised that he would retire if he didn't win the World Title that night. He won, and "Cool" Curt soon left the AWA.

WE HATE THIS PLACE... WAIT A SECOND... WE LOVE THIS PLACE

The Shepherders were on TBS with a picture of the United States going down a toilet. They were in the midst of a feud with The Fantastics. They were scheduled to battle The Fantastics in a series of flag vs. flag matches. They were also finalists in the NWA US Tag Team Tournament. Just as they were preaching "down with the USA", they showed up in the WWF. They became The Bushwackers and all of a sudden preached what a great country America is and how they are so glad to be here. What gives? Could it be they changed so quickly and realized what a great country this truly is? I doubt it. After seeing the contract McMahon offered them and realizing the money they could make, they had second thoughts about the potential quality of life in America.

PSSSSSST... DO YOU KNOW WHY KEVIN VON ERICH DOESN'T WEAR WRESTLING BOOTS?... IT'S TO MAKE KERRY JEALOUS...

That didn't make sense until that November night in Las Vegas when Kerry Von Erich was battling Col. DeBeers in Las Vegas when Kerry leaped into the ring. DeBeers didn't let go of the boot... or the foot. Kerry flew into the ring and it became apparent that Kerry had no foot inside his sock. This led to many incidents, including McMahon trying to sabotage Superclash, WCWA denying the incident, and a lot of talk throughout the wrestling world.

JETSON... I MEAN DUSTY... YOOOOOOUUUUUU'RE FIRED!!!

December was the month that saw Dusty Rhodes finally get replaced as booker of the NWA. He had been a brilliant booker years ago, and even showed signs of brilliance recently, but his ego and self-centered booker ruined any chance of him remaining as booker. The song "Destination Unknown" would fit Dusty as 1988 comes to a close. Can Dusty survive in a promotion where he isn't top dog? Would he rather be a big fish in a smaller sea, or will he be content on being a smaller fish in the big sea of the NWA?

HEY, WE JUST REMEMBERED, WE DON'T CARE

The Road Warriors finally broke out of their nasty babyface spell and returned to their natural ways--the ways of "not caring" and rulebreaking. In a six-man match with Sting, The Warriors attacked him and almost beheaded him with an awesome clothesline. From there The Roadies defeated The Midnight Express C for the elusive NWA World Tag Team Titles. The Roadies have become as popular as ever and they continue to increase their drawing power. Thanks to the turn, The Road Warriors have new life and enter 1989 as strong as ever.

COOPERATION LEADS TO SUPERCLASH III...

CAN A DIFFERENT SORT OF SUPERCLASH BE AROUND THE CORNER?

The great cooperation between WCWA, AWA, CWA, CWF, PNW, and POWW resulted in a PPV spectacular. It was a good show, but by the time the line-up was final, mysteriously only CWA, AWA, WCWA, and POWW wrestlers were involved. From there, it seemed CWA concentrated on their cards more than Superclash, and WCWA scheduled a Kerry-Lawler match three days after the PPV event in hopes of drawing a big gate, and taking the focus away from Superclash's main event. Now Jerry Jarrett owns CWA and WCWA and plans to combine the AWA and WCWA World Titles. This could leave the AWA without control of a World Title. This could lead to a Superclash... a clash between promoters that is.

AS JESSE VENTURA WOULD SAY, "BRUNO... BRUNO..."

Bruno Sammartino's long stay in the World Wrestling Federation ended this year, and not on friendly terms. "Replay" Bruno had been doing color commentary with Vince McMahon and Jesse Ventura. For years he played along with the circus he thought the WWF had become. This year various events led to his divorce with the WWF. That divorce was followed by a public tirade on wrestling. He has been criticized and defended for his actions, some of which have exposed the sport. The era of Bruno Sammartino and the WWF together ended in 1988.

BESIDES BUBBA ROGERS, THERE ARE TWO OTHER NEW BIG BOSSMEN

Both Ted Turner and Jerry Jarrett became new big bossmen. Jerry Jarrett purchased controlling interest in the WCWA, in addition to already owning the CWA. Ted Turner bought the NWA from Jim Crockett. Both buy-outs came at times when the promotions needed new blood, new money, and new hope. As 1989 begins, the direction these two promotions go is unpredictable and will be very interesting to follow. 1989 contains hope for both the NWA and CWA/WCWA and if they play their cards right, Vince McMahon could be in for some competition in the 1990's.

HE LOVES ME, YEA YEA YEA... HE LOVES ME, YEA YEA YEA

Bruce Pritchard arrived in the WWF this year. He was that kid who did interviews for the UWF in 1987 that really didn't come off as too professional. Well, he's found his niche in the WWF. He is Brother Love now, and isn't shy about letting us know that. Initially, "The Brother Love Show" was predicted to flop. However, it has become another "Piper's Pit" in that it has become the initial location where a lot of angles develop. Brother Love's red face has helped him get over also. His catch phrase, "I Luuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu You" has turned into fun. Look for a lot of Brother Love in 1989.

1988 TORCH YEAR-END AWARDS

WITH
WADE
KELLER

The end of 1988 is here. The following awards represent The Torch readers' thoughts on who deserves honor for their performance this year. The following are the results of The Torch's year-end poll. Exactly fifty readers filled out ballots and sent them in. First place votes get ten points; second place votes receive five points; third place votes get three points. The top three vote getters are listed and commented on, then fourth through tenth place are listed in order, and then comments in general follow that. So, on that note, let's go on to the first annual Pro Wrestling Torch Year-End Awards!...

WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. **RIC FLAIR** (162 pts./11 first): After missing out on first place in the Torch's Mid-Year balloting by four points, Flair managed to pull out a solid first place position by the end of the year. However, he gained less points now than he did in the Mid-Year where he had 188 points. Ric Flair held the NWA World Championship throughout the entire year. He has had great matches throughout the year with such contenders as Road Warrior Hawk, Michael Hayes, Sting, Lex Luger, and Rick Steiner. Although his style has been criticized as being a bit stale or repetitive, his overall quality of matches, hard work, interview skill, charisma, and influence on the sport made him the wrestler of the year. He finally stood up for himself near the end of the year when Ted Turner purchased the NWA. He got very frustrated with Dusty Rhodes and the way Dusty was booking him. He finally got the point across and probably had a lot to do with why Dusty Rhodes is no longer booker.

As he enters 1989 he can look forward to his best year yet. He is still at the top of his game. The new powers in the NWA allegedly want to build the promotion around him. He may finally turn babyface and have a FANTASTIC series against a former partner, Barry Windham. And he may have the opportunity to main event against Rick Steamboat again if that deal works out. 1989 could be an even better year for "Nature Boy" Ric Flair.

2. **TED DIBIASE** (140 pts./9 first): Ted DiBiase saw another great year in the WWF. He finished a strong third in the Mid-Year balloting and gained more points in this balloting. He has played a great part in the events of this year. He was the main character in the title loss of Hogan. He main evented Wrestlemania V against Savage. He even unofficially held the WWF World Title and wore the belt for several days. That came after he purchased the belt from a victorious Andre the Giant. He has proven to not only be a fantastic wrestler, as proven with his matches against Hogan and Savage, but he has proven to be one of the strongest personalities in the land of cartoon characters.

As Ted DiBiase enters 1989, it looks to be a challenging year. He has already been put in the background a little bit. He is no longer managing Andre the Giant. He is now in a dud feud with Hercules Hernandez. His gimmick may be getting stale and it may need some new twist. A lot of people think he will still hold the WWF Title in the near future. Given a new, fresh, hot angle, 1989 could prove to be another interesting year for "The Million Dollar Man".

3. **RANDY SAVAGE** (130 pts./8 first): The man to hold the WWF World Title since March has finished in third place. He finished in first place in the mid-year balloting with 191 points. He and Elizabeth are probably the second best known personalities in all of pro wrestling. He has been a strong babyface and done his best not to live in the shadow of the former champion, Hulk Hogan. He has participated in the main event at Wrestlemania V. He has been in the main event of Summerslam when he and Hogan defeated Andre and DiBiase. He was the co-winner of The Survivor Series with Hulk Hogan. He has successfully defended his title against such contenders as Ted DiBiase, Andre the Giant, One Man Gang, and Bad News Brown. He has also proven to be a great wrestler and has had many great matches. He has to be given credit for "carrying" the WWF as the lead babyface in the several month absence of Hulk Hogan. He has had a positive impact on pro wrestling in that he proved wrestling can survive and thrive without Hulk Hogan.

As we enter 1989, it looks like Savage will be the center of attention again as it is projected he will main event in Wrestlemania V against Hulk Hogan. It is not known for sure whether he will turn or not, but a Savage defense against Hogan will be "mega-successful" at the gate. In any case, it looks like Savage will remain champion for the bulk of 1989 and continue to be, along with Elizabeth, a big drawing card.

Rounding out the top ten are: Owen Hart (The Blue Blazer), Sting, Barry Windham, Jerry Lawler, Lex Luger, Curt Hennig, Eddie Gilbert.

Ironically, the top ten in the year-end balloting are the same ten men in the mid-year balloting, just in a different order... The Warlord received one third place vote... Nine out the top ten are either in the NWA or the WWF... Jerry Lawler was the top finisher outside of the top two, which really is an achievement. He has done a lot to bring the independents together and has defended his AWA Title in many territories not previously explored by AWA Champions. He also won his first World Title in 1988 by defeating Curt Hennig... Randy Savage was Pro Wrestling Illustrated's wrestler of the year with Lawler, Luger, and Flair rounding out the top four...

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR

1. **THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS C** (309 pts./26 first): Over half of the ballots had Eaton and Lane as their tag team of the year. The Midnight Express, Jim Cornette's version, gained over twice as many points as the second place finisher. They spent the year feuding with The Fantastics, The Road Warriors, Blanchard & Anderson, The Rock & Roll Express, and finally The Midnight Express D. They had GREAT matches consistently throughout the year. They defeated Tully and Arn to become World Tag Team Champions again. They also held the NWA US Tag Team Titles much of the year. They successfully turned from heel to babyface and finished the year as the most popular team in the NWA. Their teamwork is matched by no other team. Bobby Eaton and Stan Lane form what is almost the ideal team, and Jim Cornette adds needed humor, personality, and color. 1988 saw Eaton and Lane do interviews during their feud with Anderson & Blanchard. The Midnight Express simply had a great year, great matches, great angles, and great entertainment. They finished in second place in the mid-year balloting.

As they enter 1989, they are in the midst of a feud against The Midnight Express D, Jim Cornette is feuding with Paul E. Dangerously, and future feuds against The Assassins and The Warriors will probably occur in 1989. They should continue to be fine in eighty-nine.

2. **THE FANTASTICS** (138 pts./2 first): They finished first in the mid-year balloting with 240 points. That was when they were in the midst of their great feud with The Midnight Express. They finished number one in the "Readers' Ratings" tag team rankings more than any other team this year. They won and lost the NWA US Tag Team Championships on several occasions. They had great feuds with The Midnight Express, The Shepherders, and The Varsity Club. They lasted a whole year in the NWA and were accepted by the fans as replacements for The Rock & Roll Express. Although they still get booed by a bulk of the male audience, they are still good enough wrestlers that it is almost impossible not to cheer them. They did a great job getting over despite their lack of size.

As they enter 1989, they are in need of a new angle or new feud to get the interest built back in them. It seems the next logical feud will be against The Midnight Express D. The NWA has the choice of many angles to get that feud started. They could also feud against The Assassins or The SST when they arrive in the NWA. An SST-Fantastics feud would be awesome. 1989 could be another action-packed year for The Fantastics in the NWA.

3. **THE ROAD WARRIORS** (109 pts./6 first): The Road Warriors were revitalized late this year when they turned heel. They finally turned heel and quickly captured the elusive NWA World Tag Team Titles from The Midnight Express C. Not only are they probably the most hated team in the NWA after attacking Sting and Dusty Rhodes, but they are more popular than ever. Some fans will always cheer the bad guys and The Road Warriors have found those fans once again. They spent most of the first half of the year feuding with The Powers of Pain. When The Powers of Pain left for Titanland, they feuded with Ivan Koloff and The Russian Assassin. Finally in a six-man tag match with Sting, they attacked their partner and were on their way to finishing the year stronger than ever. They are re-learning how to wrestle as heels and they already have their interviews down. They have finished number-one in the "Readers' Ratings" the last two months, foreshadowing their strong finish in the year-end balloting.

As they enter 1989 there is a problem in that they need

some opponents. The Midnight Express C and possibly Sting & Luger are about the only teams they can feud with. The Fantastics would be interesting, but could it be believable with immense size difference? One scenario could see The Warriors attacking The Fantastics. Tommy Rogers gets seriously injured and is in the hospital. Bobby Fulton then is angry and searches for a partner, or another team. He then brings in a surprise--The Samoan Swat Team. Fulton could manager The SST in a great feud with The SST versus The Warriors. When that feud burns out and Rogers is back from his injury, then The SST could turn on The Fantastics and The Fantastics could then have a great feud with The SST. Anyway, that would hold The Warrior for a while until another opponent became available (possibly The British Bulldogs?). Given a fresh batch of sizable and skillful opponents, The Road Warriors could have the best year of their career.

Rounding out the top ten are: The Brain Busters, The Rougeaus, Demolition, The Rockers, The Hart Foundation, The SST, and The Megapowers.

Badd Company, Paul Diamond and Pat Tanaka, finished fourth in the mid-year balloting. After almost a full year as AWA Tag Team Champions, they have lost a lot of the respect they had at the beginning of 1988. A lot may have to do with their lack of opponents, but The Top Guns, The Guerreros and The Rock & Roll Express are three good to great teams that, had the feuds been developed, could have lead to a great series of bouts. In the year-end balloting their name appeared on only three ballots adding up to nine points... The Midnight Express D (Condrey and Rose) only got one second place vote despite being former AWA tag champs, holding the Windy City tag belts during the year while feuding with The Terminators, and ended the year in a hot feud with The Midnight Express C. I guess 1989 will have to be their year... Strike Force didn't get one vote even though they were a very highly ranked team and held the WWF tag belt for much of the first half of the year... The Road Warriors, The Midnight Express C, Demolition, and Tully and Arn were the top four vote getters in PWI's awards... The Guerreros, Badd Company, and Strike Force finished in the top ten in the mid-year ballots and not in the year-end balloting.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

1. **SCOTT STEINER** (103 pts./6 first): In 1986 top rookies included Bam Bam Bigelow, Owen Hart, Sting, Savannah Jack, and Chris Benoit. In 1987 top rookies included Brian Pillman, Shane Douglas, Biff Wellington, Doug Furnas, and Ron Simmons. This year, it seemed there were so few choices. It wasn't so much that there were no rookies, but this year's rookies weren't showcased by any promotion. Give Scott Steiner credit for showing enough skill to win this category. Scott Steiner, the brother of Rick Steiner, spent the entire year in the CWA. He was the winner of the "Renegade Rampage" tournament the CWA held. Steiner got national exposure by doing jobs on the AWA Superclash preview tapings from Memphis. Steiner finished fourth in the mid-year balloting with 29 points.

He has a lot of raw ability that could take him far in this sport. He would make good partner for his brother in the NWA if Rick Steiner's singles career slows down.

2. **RICKY RICE** (99 pts./2 first): Ricky Rice began in the AWA as a singles wrestler. Soon he found a tag team partner in a long-time friend and fellow high school buddy, John Paul McMahon. They took on the name of Rice and Dukes' old PWA team, The Top Guns. They looked pretty green at the beginning but they ended as a pretty decent team. As 1988 came to a close, John Paul has left the picture and Rice is now teaming with Derrick Dukes to reunite the Original Top Guns. Rice still needs a lot of work to be considered good, but the potential is there.

As Rice enters 1989 he is looking forward to teaming with Dukes and feuding with Badd Company and possibly winning the AWA World Tag Team Championship.

3. **Derrick Dukes** (70 pts./4 first): Dukes finally got his break in the AWA and finally began to get a push near the end of the year. He spent the bulk of the year wrestling on AWA spot shows with no TV push and also wrestling on a few PWA cards. It has been said he has the potential to be a black Owen Hart. He finished second on the mid-year balloting with 90 points.

In 1989 Derrick Dukes will have the opportunity to improve and prove himself. He, Larry Cameron, and Ron Simmons, and Koko Ware are probably the four greatest black wrestlers today and Derrick now has the spotlight on him in the AWA.

Rounding out the top ten are: Todd Morton, Max Pain, Cactus Jack Foley, Sid Vicious, Scotty the Body, and Brian Adams.

The NWA and AWA are both saying that they are going to promote the young lions in 1989. This is good news for this year's rookies and next years rookies. It seems it is about time for some new, exciting talent to enter the sport after a

pretty dry year in 1988... People like Larry Cameron, Tommy Ferrara, and Johnny Love are still eligible for rookie of the year in 1989 as they were not in a major or national group in 1988...

PROMOTION OF THE YEAR

1. **WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION** (316 pts./22 first): The WWF continued to lead the pack. They are without a doubt the number one promotion right now, and have been the most solidly run organization in 1988. They are responsible for getting pro wrestling back on prime time network television. They continue to have the best syndicated network of shows. They have the deepest roster of talent. They are marketing geniuses. They put together the most professional pay-per-view product. They promote their big shows better than any other group. However, their wrestling action and work rate often times leaves a lot to be desired. Their angles are often times embarrassing and sometimes degrading.

As they enter 1989, they have a great angle working with Hogan-Savage which will take them through Wrestlemania. Unless they do something very stupid it will be hard not to continue to be successful. They are, however, faced with a new opponent, and that is Ted Turner.

2. **NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE (NWA)** (226 pts./13 first): The NWA has and is going through a lot of changes. They certainly hit rock bottom financially, but to their credit kept their cool on screen and kept delivering wrestling. Jim Crockett sold controlling interest of the NWA to Ted Turner and Turner is determined to turn the NWA into a money making organization. However, during the year they put on some great wrestling cards, including the great Clash of the Champions, Baltimore Bash, and possibly the greatest card of the year, Starrcade. They finished a strong first place in the mid-year balloting so obviously the financial shake-ups in the later part of the year along with the no-shows hurt their year-end standing.

1989 looks to be the year of change for the NWA. The new ownership, new incoming talent, and new booker should lead to a lot of changes, hopefully for the better. A Ric Flair babyface turn could be the key to those changes along with a new look to the TBS and syndicated shows, along with the influx of new talent (SST, Casey, Steamboat???) could make the NWA a lot of fun to watch.

3. **MEMPHIS (CWA)** (93 pts./3 first): The CWA also finished third in the mid-year balloting. The territory saw the Jerry Lawler-Curt Hennig feud with Lawler eventually winning the AWA World Title. It saw Hennig destroy the CWA set and attack Lawler in a great angle. It saw The Stud's Stable form with Robert Fuller and Jimmy Golden, along with Cactus Jack Foley, Gary Young, Downtown Bruno, and Sylvia. Fuller, being booker, centered the promotion around himself, virtually making the CWA TV shows more like "The Fuller and Golden Show". Fuller did a fine job and is colorful, but he may have overdone his push. They did okay at the gate, although certainly 1988 was a down year from most. There were no great incidents like Paul E./Idol/Rich versus Lawler like 1987 saw. They were still consistently recognized as the most established independent promotion. Their exposure through FNN/Score couldn't have hurt either.

As the CWA enters 1989, it too will undergo changes. Its owner, Jerry Jarrett, recently purchased the World Class Wrestling Association (WCWA) and is merging the talent. Whether the groups merge completely is still not known, but irregardless, changes seem eminent.

Rounding out the top seven are: The Continental Wrestling Federation (CWF), The American Wrestling Association (AWA), World Class (WCWA), Calgary Stampede, and Don Owens' Pacific Northwest Group (PNW/Portland).

The AWA tried to unite many of the smaller organizations and put together a cooperative effort, and like little kids, selfishness and mismanagement ended up screwing things up. Things worked out fine, but the projected cooperation pretty much fell through. This proves that the chances of a lot of smaller regional promotions working together as a national power may be a thing of the past... The IWA received one third place vote... The chances of a third major power forming this year is greater than ever with Jarrett now owning two groups...

MATCH OF THE YEAR

1. **RIC FLAIR VERSUS STING** (Clash of the Champions from TBS on 3-27-88) (217 pts./13 first): This is also my pick for match of the year. This match had it all. It had the title on the line, the greatest wrestler of the eighties, the greatest new talent, and one of the largest audiences of the year for any match. This was the night that Wrestlemania was going on, and the fans that decided to tune for the free show were not going to get away without being very impressed with the NWA's product. The Sting-Flair 45 minute classic was the highlight of the year. The match was great in that there were no slow spots, it told a story, and nobody expected Sting to be so good. Flair was also at the top his game.

This match truly layed the pavement for Stings drive to stardom as he is deserving of the NWA's number one babyface spot. Over the long haul, Sting is the man I would go with to build a promotion around, and he is the man the fans will support over the long run. Flair proved he still had it. Overall, the action and ambience of this bout was unmatched all year. This match won the mid-year balloting also.

2. **THE FANTASTICS VERSUS THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS** (Clash of the Champions from TBS on 3-27-88) (91 pts./6 first): This match saw a great brawl at the beginning and the action picked up from there. The work rate was tremendous and the four men in the match should be commended for a great match. The US Tag Titles were on the line and the feud was still fresh. Although I don't feel this bout matched up to their 45 minute match earlier in Chattanooga, but the significance and larger audience helped this great match make it to number two in the year-end balloting.

3. **RIC FLAIR VERSUS LEX LUGER** (Baltimore Bash PPV event on 7-10-88) This match, like the Sting-Flair classic saw a young star have a better match than most expected. Lex Luger surprised a lot people in that he and Flair had a very good match. The bout was almost all action and there was a lot on

the line as this was billed as Lex Luger's first shot at the NWA World Title (although he had gotten title shots against Flair while in Florida). The ending, although not played out that well, was very effective. When the referee stopped the match as Flair was in Luger's human torture rack, the fans popped in a big way and electricity filled the air. The ending to the match allowed the re-matches to draw very well. The angle was good, the match was good, and it was a fitting main event.

Rounding out the top ten are: The Fantastics vs. The Midnight Express (Chattanooga/NWA Pro 4-26), Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage (MSG Cage 6-25), DiBiase vs. Savage (SNME 3-12), The Survivor Series Tag Team bout (11-24), Megapowers vs. Megabucks (Summerslam MSG 8-28), Jerry Lawler vs. Curt Hennig (Mid-South Coliseum AWA Title Change 5-9), and Ted DiBiase vs. Randy Savage (Trump Plaza Wrestlemania Four 3-27).

MANAGER OF THE YEAR

1. **JAMES E. CORNETTE** (367 pts/33 first): In a resounding landslide Jim Cornette has defeated Paul E. Dangerously. Both ended the year in the NWA. Cornette was in a comedic role. Dangerously was in the ultra-heel role. In 1988

TORCH UNOFFICIAL AWARDS

In the tradition of being unofficial, Pro Wrestling Torch presents the first annual "1988 Torch Unofficial Awards", the readers' version of what should have been listed on the ballot along with their pick for the awards. And now those awards...

ED VARNER'S UNOFFICIAL AWARDS:

Announcer Most Likely To Die Of Fright: LARRY NELSON
Best Kept Secret: EARL HEBNER'S JUMP FROM THE NWA TO WWF
Worst Kept Secret: MACHO MAN'S PLANNED VICTORY AT WM4
Best Kept Secret, Part 2: KERRY VON ERICH'S AMPUTATED FOOT
Worst Tag Team: MR. FUJI AND SMASH (I SAW THEM LIVE-TWICE!)
The "When you die, I hope no one mentions or acknowledges you ever existed" Award: VINCE MCMAHON
Best Article In A Newsletter: 1) DAVE MELTZER'S COVERAGE OF BRODY'S DEATH... 2) A WEEK WITH THE FED-9/15 WRESTLING FORUM
Best Anti-Steroid Human Mass: DUSTY RHODES
Worst Display Of Racism and Garbage: THE SKIT WHERE ONE MAN GANG TRANSFORMS IN THE ALLEYS OF HARLEM, COMPLETE WITH HEADHUNTING CANNIBALS.
Best Disappearing Act: BUTCH REED
Worst Heel/Should Turn Face: AL PEREZ
Worst Babyface/Should Turn Heel: BAM BAM BIGELOW
Worst Animal In Wrestling: MATILDA, FRANKIE, DAMIEN, AND GEORGE STEELE
Best Animal: SPIKE (STEINER'S PET FLY)
Most Under-Used Irritant: LARRY ZBYSZKO
Most Over-Used Irritant: DAVID CROCKETT
Best Save: JJ DILLON CATCHING OF MAGNUM DURING TULLY'S ATTACK WITH THE BAT
The "You Can't Go Home Again" Award: JESSE BARR WHO HAD TO DON HIS LONE RANGER MASK AND BECOME JIMMY JACK FUNK TO GET HEAT FROM HIS HOME TOWN FANS
Best Blade Job: CORNETTE WHEN ATTACKED BY PAUL E'S PHONE
Worst Blade Job: LUGER AT THE BALTIMORE BASH (NOT ENOUGH BLOOD)
Dan Quayle "Most Unqualified #2 Man" Award: INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMP, THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR
George Bush "Read My Lips" Award: BROTHER LOVE "I LUUUUUVE YOU"
Low Life of the Year: JOSE GONZALES
Worst Rookie: ROCKY MOUNTAIN THUNDER
Incredible Shrinking Man Award: NIKITA KOLOFF
Incredible Expanding Man Award: BUDDY ROSE

STEVE GENNARELLI'S UNOFFICIAL AWARDS:

Concept of the Year: VINCE'S ATTEMPT TO MARKET A HOGAN WAR BONNET. "THE BIG FIST HELMET"- I LIKE THE CONCEPT OF MARKETING A FOREIGN OBJECT TO KIDS AS A CHRISTMAS GIFT. TOO BAD VINCE COULDN'T GET IT OUT IN TIME.
The Sweeps Week Award: OTHER THAN L.A. LAW, THE BEST THING NBC AIRED WAS HARLEY RACE CRUSHING THE METAL TABLE IN MEMPHIS.
Best Humor Letter Not Printed in The Observer Award: MY CONCEPT THAT VERNE'S PPV SHOW WOULD REALLY SELL IF HE HYPED A "LIVE" BIG K SEGMENT WITH A GUEST WHO HAD NEVER APPEARED IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN.
Year's Most Bizarre Segment On Any Wrestling TV Show: FORGET BROTHER LOVE, BIG K, OR ANYTHING ELSE. WHAT IS MORE BIZARRE THAN BARRY ZEVAN WHO INTERVIEWS CELEBRITIES FOR THE AWA ON ESPN. ARE THE MOVIE STARS TOLD THAT THESE HYPE INTERVIEWS FOR THEIR MOVIES WILL APPEAR ON A PRO WRESTLING SHOW ON ESPN. BARRY MUST REALLY LIKE VERNE TO DO THIS!?!
Face Wrestler I Hate The Most Award: JIM DUGGAN-UGH

NANCY RIDLEY'S UNOFFICIAL AWARDS:

Best Robes: RIC FLAIR

WADE KELLER'S UNOFFICIAL AWARDS:

Most Legitimate Style of Wrestling Award: ARN ANDERSON
Best Move of the Year: STING FLYING OFF TOP ROPE AT STARRCADE ONTO ANIMAL
Is He Really Scared Award: TOMMY YOUNG ON TOP OF THE TRIPLE TOWER OF DOOM
The Tyson-Givens Relationship Length Award: CURT HENNIG AND MADUSA MICELI
I Wouldn't Have Believed You A Year Ago If You Told Me He Would Be The Top Babyface By Year's End Award: RICK STEINER
Geez' This Sucks Award: THE IWA
The John Ayres "Speaking I" Dropout Award: IWA'S "COMMISSIONER" JAMES H. KOCH
Does He Want To Play Tennis Or Announce Award: BOB MONTANA (IWA ANNOUNCER'S MICROPHONE)
Newsletter Civil War of the Year Award: ED GAREA AND TRENT WALTERS VERSUS THE UNSMART READERS
Newsletter Reader Label of the Year: BILL KUNKEL BEING LABELLED "HEEL LETTER WRITER"
Newsletter Readers of the Year: THE TORCH'S READERS
Unbelievable and Wow Award: THE UWF'S SUCCESS IN JAPAN
Japanese Wrestler of the Year: YATSU FATSO
Mr. Mike Drawing Quote of the Year: "NEVER MIND 'WILLIE B. HERT'. ALL WE WANT TO KNOW IS WHEN WILLIE B. GONE."
Jim Cornette Quote of the Year: TO DAVID CROCKETT (OF COURSE): "SHUT UP DAVID, I DIDN'T PULL YOUR STRING."
Where Exactly Is This Landmark Award: KERRY VON ERICH'S REFERRING TO THE LEANING TOWER OF PIZZA.
Worst Change In Song Award: LEX LUGER FROM THE ONE THAT PLAYED AT THE BASH TO THE ONE THAT PLAYED AT STARRCADE. Oh, That's Right, He Did Compete Here, I Didn't Notice He Had Left, Award: NIKITA KOLOFF'S DEPARTURE.
This Isn't The Time Award: JERRY LAWLER GETTING REPRESENTED PWI'S INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER OF THE YEAR PLAQUE FROM BILL AFTER BEFORE HE PLAYED ULTRA-HEEL AGAINST KERRY VON ERICH AT SUPERCLASH.
Boss J.R. Hogg Justice Award: BIG BOSSMAN
Are You Bored Or Something: STEVE WILLIAMS
She's Got Legs, and She Knows How To Use Them Award: ELIZABETH.
Best Banner at a Wrestling Card: "Ultimate Spaz!" for The Ultimate Warrior.
Mini-Vince Award: SAM DICERO
Most Intimidating Wrestler Award: LARRY "THE BUTCHER" CAMERON
What a Sight: WATCHING AN OLD TAPE OF THE UWF WHERE STING, STEINER, AND EDDIE GILBERT ARE ALL HEELS WITH STING AND STEINER HOLDING THE UWF TAG TEAM BELTS.
Who Woulda' Thunk It: RICK STEINER WOULD BE THE MOST POPULAR MAN IN THE NWA AT YEAR'S END.
Leave It, Then Love It Award: THE SHEEPHERDERS LEAVING THE NWA THEN LOVING THE USA
Wow, What A Year: 1988

ELYSE ZOIS' UNOFFICIAL AWARDS:

George Orwell 1984 Award For Rewriting History: VINCE MCMAHON
Shortest Memory: GORILLA MONSOON
Worst Ring Attire: RICK RUDE
Gimmick That Never Caught On, Thank God: HULK HOGAN'S WAR BONNET
Worst Match of the Year (Century?): ANDRE VERSUS JYD FROM PARIS-AIRED ELECTION NIGHT
Best Legs: ELIZABETH
Shortest I-C Title Match: ULTIMATE WARRIOR VERSUS HTM
How Can He Be Undeclared When I Saw Him Pinned? (Tie): ANDRE THE GIANT AND BAD NEWS BROWN. ***

Cornette went from a top heel manager in his feud against The Fantastics to probably the best babyface manager in his feud against Paul E. and his Express. He continues to amuse the fans, insult his opponents, and support one of the greatest spontaneous sense of humors the wrestling world has ever seen.

1989 could see him finally go to the WWF, or continue in the NWA and feud against heel managers. I still think he should manage more than just The Midnight Express, as anyone he manages would almost immediately get over. In any case, I think Paul E. Dangerously will prove to be greater competition after he gets a little more exposure.

2. **PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY** (180 pts./ 3 first): Paul E. also finished second in the mid-year balloting with 179 points (he improved by a point) where Cornette was first with 264 points. He began the year in the AWA and was manager of the AWA World Tag Team Champions, The Original Midnight Express. He moved on to be involved in a great angle on Pro Wrestling This Week with Gordon Solie and Joe Pedicino. It saw him "buy-out" stock holders and hold the majority of PWTW stock. He went on to get lectured by Gordon Solie, fire Gordon Solie, co-host the show, turn over his chair to Patrick Shaefer, and move on to other things. He and Eddie Gilbert were the highlight of CWF this year, and he also left tracks in Chicago for Sam DiCero's Windy City Wrestling. Finally, as 1988 came to a close he moved up to the major leagues in the NWA and was involved in a great angle and feud with Jim Cornette. As Jim Ross said, I think we're going to be seeing a lot of this man over the years.

1989 should see Paul E. establish himself as the number one manager in the heel position. Hopefully he will not only manage The Midnight Express, but when the timing is right, also manage such stars as Bam Bam Bigelow and Eddie Gilbert.

3. **BOBBY HEENAN** (110 pts./4 first): Bobby Heenan continued to be the lead manager in the WWF. He was part of the Hogan-Savage-Andre-DiBiase feud. He now manages The Brain Busters. He also manages Rick Rude, King Haku, and early in the year, Hercules and The Islanders. He continues to work well with Gorilla Monsoon on Prime Time Wrestling and Wrestling Challenge. He stays fresh and takes good bumps.

1989 should see him continue to be the top manager in the WWF (mainly due to his office position) and continue to do the same thing as always but with new faces and new angles.

Rounding out the top ten are: Elizabeth, Slick, James J. Dillon, Paul Ellering, Gary Hart, Jimmy Hart, and Buddy Roberts.

Jim Cornette and Paul E. finished one and two respectively in the "Readers' Ratings" top ten interviews... Cornette and Dangerously finished third and tenth respectively in the overall favorite personality rankings in the "Readers' Ratings"... Downtown Bruno, Brother Ernest Angel, and Kevin Sullivan all placed in the mid-year balloting and dropped out of the top ten by year's end... Damien received one vote... Diamond Dallas Page received only one vote...

ANNOUNCER OF THE YEAR

1. **JIM ROSS** (312 pts./25 first): Jim Ross has a way of making bad matches seem good, good matches seem great, and great matches turn into classics. He goes out of his way to get details on wrestlers including age, background in college, and other trivial stuff that adds to the match. He calls action in a way that is never insulting to the audience's intelligence. He can be a good color man also. His true knowledge of the business comes through on each show or event he announces. He is unmatched in the business.

2. **JESSE VENTURA** (174 pts./9 first): Jesse Ventura doing color commentary is, for a lot of people, the highlight of a WWF show. He works very well off of Vince and knows how not to go too far. Although he plays the heel announcer role, he is very popular. That wouldn't happen if he wasn't very good. His spontaneity on live PPV events is unmatched. As long as Vince can keep Jesse behind the mic, we'll take him.

JAPANESE AWARDS

JAPANESE WRESTLER OF THE YEAR:

- 1-AKIRA MAEDA
- 2-TATSUMI FUJINAMI
- 3-ANTONIO INOKI

JAPANESE TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR:

- 1-FOOTLOOSE
- 2-TENYRU & HARA
- 3-JUMPING BOMB ANGELS

JAPANESE MATCH OF THE YEAR:

- 1-FOOTLOOSE VS. NAKANO/TAKADA (7-19)
- 2-HASE VS. TAKADA (3-7)
- 3-INOKI VS. FUJINAMI

SPECIAL CATEGORY

On the ballot for awards there was a place to list your favorite Torch features. Almost all of you did so. The following is a list of the top 15 vote getters. The only eligible features are the written features, excluding the picture and comics...

TOP TORCH FEATURES

- 1) THE HOT NEWS by Wade Keller
- 2) RING RUMBLINGS by Ray Whebbe
- 3) SUBMISSION by Mick Karch
- 4) THE NEWS RUN-DOWN by Wade Keller
- 5) MR. MIKE'S MONDO TORCHING
- 6) TORCH NEWSBREAKERS by Wade Keller
- 7) WHATS OUT THERE by Steve Gerber
- 8) RINGSIDE BEAT by The Readers
- 9) IF I BECAME BOOKER by The Readers
- 10) QUOTEBOOK by The Wrestlers
- 11) THE READERS RATINGS by The Readers
- 12) READER RHETORIC by The Readers
- 13) DDT by Tracy Breeden
- 14) CHARACTER SKETCH by Ray Whebbe
- 15) IT BEEZ THAT WAYS by Wade Keller

On the ballot I asked you to jot down your favorite Torch article over the entire year. Fourteen of you did so and understood the rather vague question. The following is a list of all the articles mentioned:

- Torch Tribute To Bruiser Brody 7-28 (3 Votes)
- Hot News: "Blackmail In People's Court" 2-25 (2 Votes)
- Hot News: "The Smokers" 5-5 (2 Votes)
- Hot News: "The Golden Guys" 9-22 (1 Vote)
- Hot News: "Luger and Steroids" 10-20 (1 Vote)
- Hot News: "Damien Interview" 11-17 (1 Vote)
- Ringside Beat: Survivor Series Coverage 12-1 (1 Vote)
- Meltzer's Mid-Year Picks (PWT Annual) (1 Vote)
- Whebbe Interviews Zenk and Brody (PWT Annual) (1 Vote)
- If I Were Booker (PWT Annual) (1 Vote)

3. **LANCE RUSSELL** (120 pts./3 first): Lance Russell got a lot of national exposure this year through Score. He works so well in the studio format and is often responsible for carrying many of the less experienced Memphis wrestlers through interviews. He and Dave Brown are a great combination, and his cliches are fun to listen to. Russell may be the most enjoyable announcer to watch work.

Rounding out the top ten are: Tony Shrivane, Vince McMahon, Gorilla Monsoon, Gordon Solie, Bobby Heenan, Lee Marshall, and Bob Caudle.

Remember Craig DeGeorge. Well he didn't make it through the year in the WWF and was replaced by Shawn Mooney... Remember Doug McCloud from Pro Wrestling USA? He is now doing play by play for the Minnesota North Stars (NHL Professional Hockey)... Ken Resnick is still doing ring announcing for WWF cards in this area...

FEUD OF THE YEAR

1. **TED DIBIASE VERSUS RANDY SAVAGE** (165 pts./10 first): This feud was also number one in the mid-year balloting. Two of the top ten matches of the year were from these two men. Although they haven't been feuding for months now, their feud remained in people's minds and they pulled out the number one spot. Now bring on the Hennig-Savage bouts.

2. **THE FANTASTICS VERSUS THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS** (149 pts./12 first): This feud was also number two in the mid-year balloting with 148 points. Two of their bouts also made the top ten list of matches of the year. This feud brought out the best of the two teams.

3. **JAKE ROBERTS VERSUS RICK RUDE** (76 pts./3 first): The angle leading into this feud was great and surprisingly so were the matches. I don't think too many thought this feud would go over like it did, but it ended up headlining many cards. Both men worked hard during this feud. At times the angles were in bad taste, like Roberts trying to rip Rude's tights off and the drawings and their locations on Rick Rude's tights, but it was effective enough to pull out a third place position in the balloting.

Rounding out the top ten are: Midnight Express vs. Midnight Express, Ric Flair vs. Sting, Jerry Lawler vs. Kerry Von Erich, Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger, Eddie Gilbert vs. Jerry Lawler, Midnight Express vs. Blanchard & Anderson.

ANGLE/PUSH/GIMMICK OF THE YEAR

1. **RICK STEINER AND THE VARSITY CLUB** (162 pts./13 first): The Varsity Club gimmick is great in itself, but when all of a sudden Mike Rotunda and Rick Steiner developed personalities and started to fight amongst themselves, it became a classic. The turn of Steiner led to him being the hottest wrestler in the NWA.

2. **HULK HOGAN LOSES BELT DUE TO TWIN REFEREES** (99 pts./6 first): On prime time network television Hulk Hogan lost his

belt in a very imaginative way which saw him not have to have his shoulders down for three, Andre become a World Champion, DiBiase to become a World Champion (unofficially), twin referees fight between themselves, and a whole lot for fans to talk about.

3. **THE ORIGINAL MIDNIGHT EXPRESS AND PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY ATTACK THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS AND JIM CORNETTE** (92 pts./3 first): This angle was played to perfection. Nobody expected Paul E. and his team to be on set. Cornette bled which added to the realism of the incident. The intrigue with the fighting over the name "Midnight Express", not to mention the skill of both teams and managers, makes this a great feud. If not for the original brilliant angle, this feud may not have stood out.

Rounding out the top ten are: Road Warriors turn on Sting, Barry Windham turns on Lex Luger and becomes Horseman, Curt Hennig becomes "Mr. Perfect", Cheryl Roberts slaps Rick Rude when he wants to give her the "Rude Awakening", The turn of The Rougeaus, Big Bubba becomes The Big Bossman, and Curt Hennig destroys the CWA set and attacks Jerry Lawler.

MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. **STING** (173 pts./15 first): Match of the Year; 5th place for Wrestler of the Year; 5th place for Feud of the Year; consistently in the top ten in the "Readers' Ratings". What more needs to be said. He also was first in the mid-year balloting.

2. **RICK STEINER** (103 pts./5 first): Not only has he found feuds to showcase his talents, but he now has a personality, a gimmick, and does interviews well. He greatly improved in almost every way possible. He wasn't on the top ten list on the mid-year balloting.

3. **LEX LUGER** (52 pts./2 first): Luger has really progressed from a Ultimate Warrior-type muscle mass with no stamina to an agile, motivated wrestler that is worth watching.

Rounding out the top ten are: The Blue Blazer, Ultimate Warrior, Steve Cox, Al Perez, Barry Windham, Paul Roma, and Jeff Jarrett.

MOST DEPROVED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. **DUSTY RHODES** (86 pts./7 first): Dusty Rhodes continued to wrestle in his same amusing stale offensive style. While booker he continue to overpush himself shoving himself down the fans throats. He might be able to be appreciated if he wasn't the center of every feud.

2. **GREG VALENTINE** (64 pts./2 first): Laziness and lack of desire seem to have overcome Valentine's wrestling style. As rumored, a jump to the NWA might motivate him again.

3. **KEN PATERA** (61 pts./5 first): By the end of 1988 Ken Patera's bouts showed more light than the sun. His muscles disappeared and were replaced by flab. His interviews somehow took a turn for the worse, and all this led to a pink slip.

Rounding out the top ten are: Nikita Koloff, Bam Bam Bigelow, The Blue Blazer (Owen Hart), Hacksaw Duggan, Andre the Giant, Hulk Hogan, and Steve Williams.

TELEVISION SHOW OF THE YEAR

1. **WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING** (163 pts./10 first): This is the WWF's "A-Show" where just about all angles start and end. It features the commentary of Jesse Ventura and Vince McMahon. It is very professional and unmatched when it comes to production values.

2. **NWA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING** (107 pts./3 first): This is the NWA's "A-Show" where just about all angles start and end. It features the expert commentary of Jim Ross and Tony Shiavone. Although it's been criticized for being too heavy on interviews and too light on wrestling, it seems that is now changing. With the arena that it will be taped in soon, it should improve the visual credibility of the show.

3. **WWF SATURDAY NIGHTS MAIN EVENT** (106 pts./9 first): This semi-regular feature on NBC continues to be the favorite show of many people. It has main event caliber matches along with great production values and great announcing.

Rounding out the top ten are: CWA Championship, CWF, Prime Time Wrestling, NWA Main Event (which was in first place in mid-year balloting), Calgary Stampede, and NWA World Wide.

BABYFACE WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. **STING** (225 pts./12 first): Again, Sting comes out on top of yet another category. Obviously, Sting is a big part of the future of pro wrestling.

2. **HULK HOGAN** (187 pts./10 first): He came back after a several month absence as popular as ever. He continues to get more heat than any wrestler in his post-match posing. He is a true superstar with the charisma to make him the most recognizable name in all of wrestling.

3. **RANDY SAVAGE** (182 pts./9 first): A lot of his popularity has to be attributed to Elizabeth, but there is no doubt Randy Savage plays the babyface role very well.

Rounding out the top ten are: Rick Steiner, Lex Luger, Jerry Lawler, The Blue Blazer, Brutis Beefcake, Elizabeth, and The Ultimate Warrior.

HEEL OF THE YEAR

1. **TED DIBIASE** (276 pts./22 first): Ted DiBiase was the lead heel in the leading federation. He played his part to perfection and resoundingly won this award by getting over three times as many points as the number two vote getter. He also got first place in the mid-year balloting.

2. **BARRY WINDHAM** (86 pts./6 first): Barry Windham surprised the heck out of a lot of people. He has turned into one of the finest heels in the business today. His arrogance radiates from him. His interviews have improved ten times over and he's finally found a niche in wrestling. He is the lead heel the NWA was looking for that will allow Ric Flair to turn babyface. Barry Windham will lead the NWA into the 1990's.

3. **EDDIE GILBERT** (68 pts./3 first): He is a babyface now and doing a really good job at it. However, he was a villain through most of 1988 in the CWF and CWA. In the CWF he and Paul E. Dangerously helped the CWF become recognized as the top independent organization for a while in 1988. Ironically, he is now feuding with second place winner, Barry Windham over the NWA US Title.

Rounding out the top ten are: Ric Flair, Curt Hennig, Andre the Giant, The Road Warriors, Rick Rude, Jerry Lawler, and The Honkeytonk Man.

WORST WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. **ANDRE THE GIANT** (137 pts./10 first): Although he has probably improved a bit during this year, he is still too big and too overweight to actually wrestle. Luckily, his size is enough to get him over so skill isn't that big of an issue.

2. **THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR** (128 pts./8 first): In his case, his muscular development is enough to get him over with the public. He doesn't need to be a good wrestler to be successful. His cardiovascular development is terrible and his repertoire of moves is very limited. To think he and Sting were at the same level as a team a few years ago.

3. **THE JUNKYARD DOG** (102 pts./6 first): Well, JYD didn't make it through this year without being recognized as one of the worst wrestlers in the business. He is out of shape and doesn't seem to care. Maybe being in the NWA will help him shape up in 1989. It will be interesting to see if he escapes this category next year at this time.

Rounding out the top ten are: Dusty Rhodes, Ken Patera (my pick), Hulk Hogan, Rocky Mountain Thunder, Jimmy Valiant, Danny Davis, and George Steele.

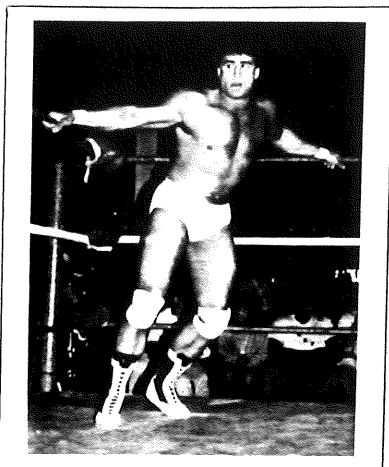
WORST PROMOTION OF THE YEAR

1. **AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION (AWA)** (123 pts./6 first): The AWA practically shut down for a lot of the year. They don't have enough support to run regular cards in their home base of Minnesota. Their exchange of talent was great. They lost such key names as Curt Hennig and The Rockers. To their credit they put together a moderately successful "Superclash" PPV event in December. Who knows where they'll go in 1989.

2. **WORLD CLASS WRESTLING ASSOCIATION (WCWA)** (88 pts./3 first): This group faced a lot of financial trouble in 1988 and the promotion was sold to Jerry Jarrett of the CWA. World Class will probably improve in 1989 as they have an exchange of talent going with CWA. Hopefully the Von Erich family won't face any more serious illnesses or deaths in 1989. 1989 may be their year. Then again, it might not.

3. **INTERCONTINENTAL WRESTLING AMERICA (IWA)** (70 pts./7 first): Those who saw this Minnesota based promotion knew what they were seeing was the worst promotion. Every vote it got was a first place vote. When your lead heel is Chris Markoff and your lead babyface is Steve O, you know you're in trouble. It has all but disappeared and hopefully stay invisible throughout 1989.

Rounding out the top ten are: NWA, WWF, ICW, Central States/WWA, GLOW/POWW, Deep South, and Southern Championship Wrestling. ***



JOURNEY TO JAPAN ΨΨ

JOURNEY TO JAPAN WITH TOM ZENK by Ray Whebbe

Tom Zenk has wrestled around the world and then some. He wrestled before 93,000 at Wrestlemania III and has struggled before 93 in small independents. He's also toured with the AWA, Mid-South, Portland, Montreal International, WWF, PWA, and most independents in the free world. Yet the group Zenk most enjoys working for is Tokyo's All-Japan group. In this special Torch feature we'll see why...

-RAY WHEBBE

WHEBBE: How many times have you been to Japan?

ZENK: I've worked for All-Japan three times now, each being a three week tour.

WHEBBE: How did you get involved with All-Japan?

ZENK: Two things. I always tried hard and they liked that, but Rick Martel really got me to go with him.

WHEBBE: The Can-Ams first appeared for All-Japan in the 1986 Real World Cup Tag Tournament, correct?

ZENK: That's right. Rick and I teamed some before in Montreal and really talked about it for a long time. In Japan we realized how truly good we could work together as a team. The Japanese bookers and fans realized that and appreciated it right away. Usually, we had a good look and the Japanese like that too, but they also liked our work.

Baba made us a helluva offer then to tour with All-Japan regularly and I've regretted not doing it from that day on. Fortunately though, I've kept good relations with All-Japan and will still go there three times a year. But Rick and I did well together and could have done even better. I regret not keeping the team together for Japan and the independents.

WHEBBE: Many baseball players and even some wrestlers find athletics in Japan to be too stressful, yet you seem to love it.

ZENK: I do! Wrestling in Japan is fabulous. I wish I could be there all the time. Some guys go through culture shock but I find it compelling and challenging.

For one, the fans make it enjoyable. They respect you for your hard work in the ring and respect the hard work going into building a good body.

The country is beautiful and easy to appreciate. The differences in styles, cars, buildings, architecture, and appearances is stimulating. I truly love Japan and the Japanese culture. Their culture respects hard work, the people all work hard, and they love good, competitive wrestling.

WHEBBE: What do you do to gear up for these tours?

ZENK: As much as they are fun, they can be hard. Competing seven days a week at the hardest level of your life for three weeks can really be hard in your body. So can the long plane trips.

About three months before each trip I pick up on the cardiovascular exercises. The All-Japan workrate is superior to that in the US and to compete I have to be in top shape.

About two months before, I hit the weights like I'm possessed. I also hit the buffets harder and eat a lot. Well proportioned size impresses the Japanese.

They're also very honorable people. A handshake there is better than a contract from most US promoters. The All-Japan people are just great businessmen.

WHEBBE: The press, too, is favorable to wrestling. Even the daily papers cover the sport...

ZENK: That's right, Ray. And they cover it intelligently. They push people to be competitive and never talk about bogus stuff like Russians training in dungeons. The press covers wrestling like our papers cover baseball or football. And they even pay you to do interviews. (W.K.: Thank goodness The Torch isn't based out of Japan!)

WHEBBE: Unlike the situation in the US where wrestlers practically have to beg for publicity...

ZENK: Everything that's successful about Japanese wrestling points to the fact that they are great businessmen. They treat wrestlers like athletes and are rewarded with great matches.

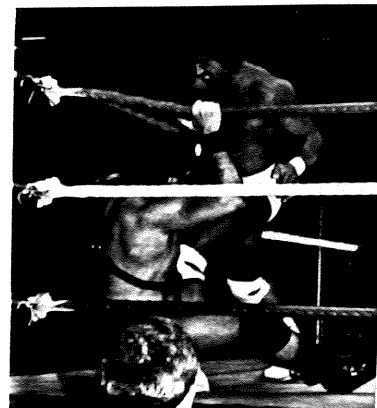
WHEBBE: I understand that many Japanese fans look at wrestlers in awe. Is this true?

ZENK: Sure is. The people are impressed by size and often just like to look and sometimes touch. But they always do it in a respectful way.

WHEBBE: Yet they also like to be scared?

ZENK: True. They like to be scared to a point. Like with Brody or Abdullah. They like to be chased out of their seats.

RICK MARTEL
VERSUS
DEMOLITION AXE



WHEBBE: In your three tours to Japan, Tom, you've had the privilege of touring with four legend grapplers-Bruiser Brody, Stan Hansen, Abdullah the Butcher, and Jimmy Snuka. Did you enjoy that?

ZENK: You bet. I learned a lot from these men and they were all very gracious and helpful. I teamed some with Snuka on my last tour and was very impressed. He's a phenomenal athlete. You know, Ray, he could have been bigger than the Hulk but was held down. But he's a decent guy and a proud father. He loves his kid.

WHEBBE: Tell us about the Brody Memorial card...

ZENK: It was great and eerie at the same time. I mean, it was weird with an arena packed paying homage to a wrestler's casket. The crowd was so into it you could feel Brody's spirit. It truly touched me. It was also beautiful to see all the fans bring him roses and gifts. And a lot of money was raised for his family. Brody was a true hero and the Japanese loved him. It's a shame all the American promoters would say is he was trouble. Yea, trouble cause he wanted to get paid?

The American promoters don't understand fair play and treating people right, yet All-Japan would have it no other way. Everything from the hotel room to travel arrangements are first class.

**HOW COULD YOU BELIEVE ME WHEN I TOLD YOU THAT I LOVED YOU
WHEN YOU KNOW I'VE BEEN A LIAR ALL MY LIFE**

That's what Kevin Sullivan is saying now. Earlier in the year he had sort of put Precious in a trance and brought back memories of an alleged previous relationship between them. Well, actually, no one ever understood this angle that Kevin Sullivan dreamed up. It did lead to the "Triple Tower of Doom" at The Baltimore Bash. Precious ended up back with Jimmy Garvin and everyone was happy... happy that the confusing angle was over.

BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

At least it is for The Rock & Roll Express. They both left the NWA and went to the AWA. Then they returned to the NWA at The Clash of the Champions II. Robert Gibson didn't last long and returned to the AWA. Ricky Morton teamed with Nikita Koloff for a while, but breaking up is hard to do, and he returned to the AWA to reunite with Robert and reform The Rock & Roll Express. Now they seem to be content working the AWA, Japan, and Independents.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS HIS BOTTOM LINE

That was what Arn Anderson was saying when he and Tully Blanchard left the NWA and moved on to the WWF. Tully had wanted to go for a long time, and Arn Anderson was on Vince's top ten list. They finally left The Four Horsemen (I'm sure they brought with them a large supply of the "Four Horsemen Vitamins") and became part of the Bobby Heenan family under the name "The Brain Busters" (sort of ironic in that their manager is nicknamed "The Brain").

**WWF FANS SAW BIRDS... AND IT'S NOT BECAUSE THEY WERE HIT
BY HACKSAW'S 2 BY 4**

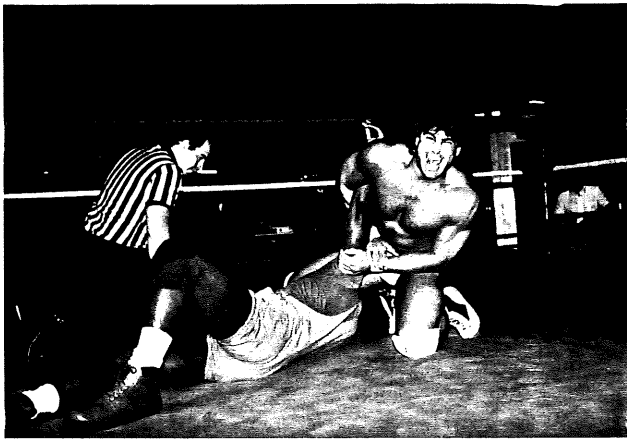
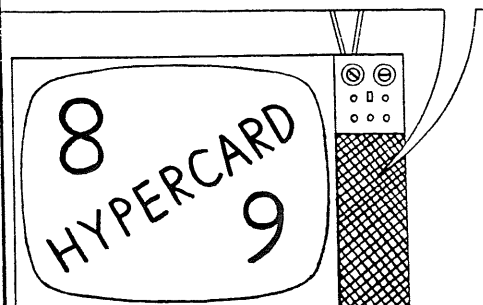
First there was Koko B. Ware. Then came his real live bird, Frankie. That seemed fine and dandy. But when The Blue Blazer showed up in the WWF dressed as a bird with feathers and all, things got a little fishy (or birdy?). Anyway, then Terry Taylor showed up and was labeled "The Red Rooster"! Now things were going a bit too far. I was afraid Curt Hennig would be nicknamed "Crowing" Curt Hennig, or that Arn Anderson would be labeled "The Balding Eagle" (Hey, I just thought of this, and it has nothing to do with birds, but if being bald qualifies one to a WWF World Champion [i.e. Superstar Graham, Iron Sheik, Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, etc] then isn't Arn Anderson in for super success in the WWF?)...

THE ULTIMATE SPAZ

That's what The Ultimate Warrior does just prior to all of his matches. He developed this routine over 1988. Early in the year he brought a chain in with him and violently swung it over his head before matches, but when Hercules turned babyface, the chain became Herc's exclusive gimmick. Then The Anabolic Warrior (as some call him) went to his current format of running in the ring and spazing out by grabbing and shaking the ropes until he blows up. It is very effective as the fans love it. ***

ZHOZHAN THE WIZARD

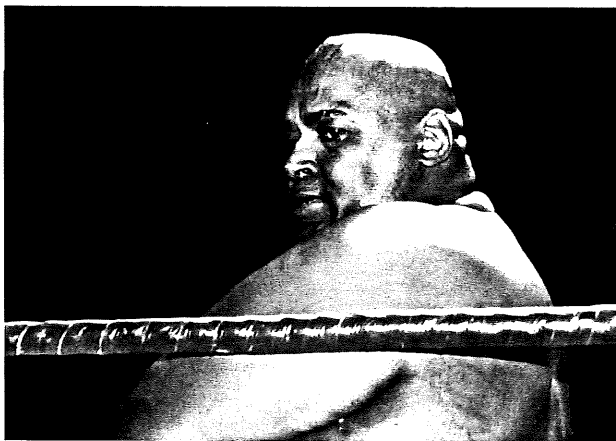
The Global Wrestling League presents the greatest wrestling event of the year: Hypercard 89. Zhozhan the Wizard defends the Global lightweight championship against Dr. Voodoo, the Miracle Workers challenge the Space Dancers for the lightweight tag team belts, the 3 O'clock Rockers meet the New Generation in a Rubik's cage match, Ferdinand Marcos battles Idi Amin with the winner getting their country back, Madman Morris defends the heavyweight belt against USSF champion Leonid Nurenski, the Riders of Doom defend the heavyweight tag team title against the Right Brothers with special guest referee Judge Bork, and more! Don't miss pro wrestling's best!



TOM ZENK ARMBARS MR. DESTRUCTION
ON AN INDEPENDENT PWA CARD

WHEBBE: Do you ever feel stranded over there. I mean it's not like John Paul and Ricky Rice who halfway to Wisconsin quit the AWA and returned to Edina.

ZENK: That's right. There's no going home. And some wrestlers don't like it. Let's face it, Ray, some guys don't like to work hard and All-Japan demands hard work. but they are fair and decent. It's like working for a great corporation. They want you to be happy, play fair, offer the best conditions, and pay the best money. They also offer top competition. In return I give All-Japan my best every time out and train like a maniac before going there. And I have to. The wrestlers there are real athletes.



ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER OFTEN TOURS JAPAN

WHEBBE: And you like the competition?

ZENK: Definitely. It's like the World Series or Superbowl. I get pumped and stay pumped up. It's challenging. They make a move and you have to counter or vice versa. The competition is great and I'm adapting well. On my last tour I wasn't pinned once. The Japanese style is my personal favorite.

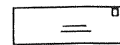
WHEBBE: Does that eliminate you from working for a major US group?

ZENK: No. Not really. It's a matter of timing and money. I'm a businessman first and foremost, but I hope I'm always able to return to Japan.

WHEBBE: Judging from your tapes, I don't think you'll have to worry.

ZENK: Thanks Ray. I sure hope you're right.***

Mick Karch's Special Letterbag



As host of "Saturday Night At Ringside" on KTMA-TV 23 in Minneapolis, I have segments called "Fan Feedback" wherein I invite viewers to send in questions or comments about professional wrestling. I chose the ones that appear to have the most interest, merit, or even humor, and read them on the air. The following are excerpts of letters that didn't make the airwaves, for reasons I'm sure you'll be able to decipher. Again, these are real "shoot" letters, folks. Live it up...

"Here's hoping Terry Bollea finally pops a lung on his muscle juice. That guy must have petrified balls by now. Hopefully, we can be spared all this "Hulkamania" garbage....."

"Please convey a message to the announcer on Dallas (Marc Lowrance) that I am not stupid, and the people are not stupid. He always say (sic) that "Kimala" is the Botswana Beast, from the jungles of Botswana, but I live there most of my life and Botswana, it is dry and barren, and not a jungle at all. So please, Mr. Announcer, sir, do not show your stupidity by saying such nonsense....."



"Manufacturers of straight jackets must be licking their lips over the news that Jimmy Snuka is back in action....."

"Please, please, please, take POWW off the air. The women are pathetic, and that David McLane is enough to give you cramps. All this time, I thought Howdy Doody was on display at the Smithsonian Institute, and here he shows up as the POWW promoter!!!!!!"

"You know, I find it absolutely amazing that in 25 years, Chris Markoff has never changed one word of his interviews. I was sick to death of hearing about "standing up, and give the flag a saloot (sic)" year ago, and it nauseates me today. He was horrid in '65 and it's been downhill since....."

"Bob Montana must be a Columbia School of Broadcasting reject. That guy should be doing play by play for high school soccer. I'd like to take that hand of his that's always making these obnoxious gestures and chew on it. As far as the rest of the IWA, I feel the way that fan did who threw Big Jim Gagnon's tee-shirt back at him after he tossed it in the audience as a souvenir. I'd like to throw the whole promotion back at them....."

"Where the hell did they come up with Bonnie Blackstone? I couldn't stand Patrick Shafer, but when he called her a bimbo, I stood up and cheered. There are turnips in this world with a higher I.Q. than her....."

"I'm so sick and tired of the dirty tactics of Kimala and Iceman. Why don't they put two referees in there before these animals kill someone? Why, I've been so angry that I even need a new chair....."

"Let's stick to the wrestling only, and have much less of that guy comes on in between talking about who knows what....." (M.K.: Where's John Hinkley, Jr. when you need him.)

"Why do you waste your time interviewing snot noses like The Derringer Brothers? Where are the Roadies? Surely there must be some way you can avoid having these borderline-midgets on camera in the future. Sure, they may be great jobbers, but jobbers should be seen, not heard, except when they groan....."

"My favorite wrestlers are Hulk Hogan and The Ultimate Warrior. I get sick of hearing Ric Flair and Jerry Lawler talking about how they are the real world champions. You know what the difference between them and Hulk Hogan is. At least Hulk and Warrior are real wrestlers, that know the holds, not just a couple of blowhards who are all talk and no show....."



"My favorite lady wrestler is Madusa Miceli. I hear and read about how good these Japanese women wrestlers are. Well, they can't hold a candle to Madusa....."

"Really got a charge out of the interview you did with Mike St. James. Also thought it was great that the morning after he does your show, where he came across as the nicest guy this side of Santa Claus, that he shows up on Verne's Showboat "extravaganza" as Mike Smith, escaped child molester. By the way, how much of his interview did you have to spoon-feed this guy? His "finish" line would have been good, if he could have put a complete sentence together....."

"Doesn't it scare you that Wade Keller someday will make a lot more money in the wrestling business than you do?....." (M.K.: No. I'm used to it. He already has.)

"I remember Mad Dog Vachon once saying that his sister, Vivian, divorced Buddy Wolfe because she was tired of beating him up....."

"Who can understand Hogan's narcotic-induced babble anymore? I wish he'd stuff his war bonnet up his rear....."



"I was very shocked to see what Pat Tinaka (sic) did to one of the greatest Americans ever in the world, Brad Renner (sic). He should be sent to jail for attempted murder and all the people who watch your show can be witnesses to what they seen....."

"Now Dusty tells us there "isn't a steroid" in his body. no fooling?? What a startling revelation! Who would have ever guessed? Next he'll tell us that it snows in Minneapolis in January, or that Richard Nixon couldn't be trusted....." ***



Bruiser Brody
and
Adrian Adonis
Remembered

1988 saw two of America's top stars die tragically. Adrian Adonis along with promoter Dave McKigney (see last tribute), and one of the Kelly Twins were tragically killed in a car accident in Canada this June. Bruiser Brody was stabbed to death in what has to be considered the biggest story of the decade. A lot of facts and rumors have already been reported. But instead of dwelling on the loss, let's take a brief look at what they gave us over the years. The following letters are some of the The Torch's readers' thoughts and memories concerning these great legends in wrestling... -W.K.

Reader's Memories of Adrian Adonis:

DAN FARREN:

When Adrian Adonis first started out, he wrestled as Gorgeous Keith Franks in Southern California. Every Sunday Night I would attend the San Bernardino card at a little shack called the "Arena". Gorgeous Keith stood quietly in the corner watching the matches while waiting for his event. A small girl walked up to Keith carrying an index card and a pen. She looked him over for a minute, then raised the pen and card toward Keith.

"Go away", he said.

The girl stood her ground.

Finally, big and mean Keith Franks signed the autograph and whispered to her.

"Don't tell anybody."

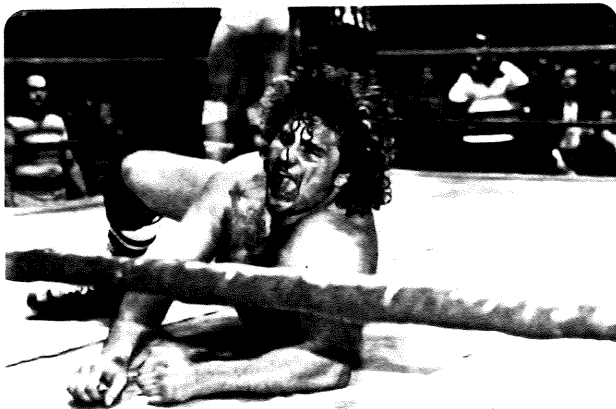
Whenever I think of Adrian Adonis, I think of that story.

MICK KARCH:

It's funny, but I've been around this business from a professional standpoint for fifteen years, and the two men who I was always in awe of, in the sense that I didn't know what to expect when dealing with them, were Bruiser Brody and Adrian Adonis.

I've already recalled my dealings with Brody, so now, just a brief history of my sadly infrequent encounters with Adrian.

The guy always struck me as being just a little off the wall, and that has been documented by some others within the business. But I always was enthralled with his wrestling ability, particularly early on in his AWA days. His interview persona was one of my all-time favorites.



ADRIAN ADONIS: 1980

I also recognized that Adonis was fearless. He was one tough S.O.B., who would go nose to nose with anyone and not back down. I remember one night in St. Paul when some ringsiders of mammoth proportions, the body builder type, were razzing Adrian, challenging him to a fight. As was his custom, Adrian was ready to have it out with all of them, and when the St. Paul policeman tried to pull him away, he yanked his arm away from the cop and said, "get your hands off me, don't ever touch me." In the locker room, the police all agreed that they would be very hesitant to give Adrian his customary to-and-from-the-ring escort from that point on.

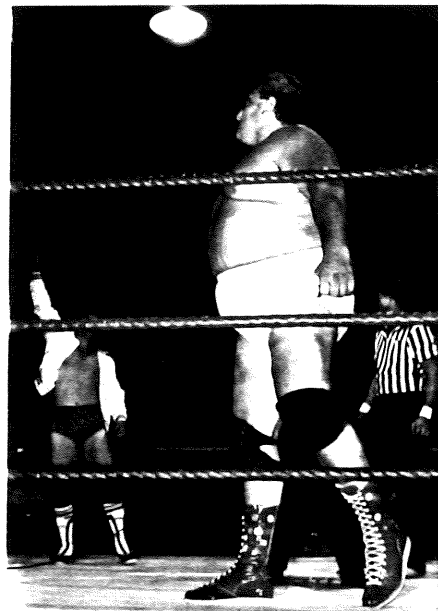
My personal dealings with him were limited, but memorable. The first time I met him (hard to believe after he had been here for years), was at the AWA's TV tapings in Whitewater, Wisconsin. He didn't want to be there, pure and simple (as the evening progressed, it was easy to understand why.) He sat alone in the locker room, very disgusted, and I decided to approach him, introduce myself, and 'test the waters'. His response was tepid, but mildly friendly. Later, when I launched into a Howard Finkel impression for Curt Hennig, Adrian heard it, laughed, and the ice was broken.

The next contact was in Las Vegas for another ESPN tape. This time, I was going to interview he and Bob Orton, Jr.

after one of their TV bouts. I approached Adrian before the tapings, briefly went through the interview, and found him much more open, relaxed, and amiable than he had been in Whitewater. The interview itself went well, and when I saw him after the matches, he was cordial, although something other than a natural high was obviously directing his behavior.

The next AWA tapings were in North Dakota. I was unable to make that set of tapings, and coincidentally, Adrian was injured that evening.

I never had the opportunity to talk to him again.



ADRIAN ADONIS: 1987

STEVE GENNARELLI:

Although I saw Adonis in person two or three times, my fondest memories of him were from the TV. Remember the skit with Mean Gene and Dick Murdoch going to New York City. The bawdy on "TNT"-priceless. My favorite match involving Adrian was from MSG 7/86- A cage match where he teamed with Savage vs. Santana and Bruno Sammartino. All four worked very hard in this tornado style cage bout. When I think of Adrian, I remember his era of the VWF-Piper, Adrian, Jesse, Orton, Orndorff. The Titan of today is a booming cartoon in comparison. As Dave Meltzer mentioned, not only did Vince fail to pay tribute to Keith Franke, he prevented others from doing so. It's that kind of attitude that drove Sammartino out. Irregardless, Adrian Adonis should be remembered as one of the best all-around performers of the 1980's US Pro Wrestling Scene. The ring work and interviews combined, few compare favorably with Franke.

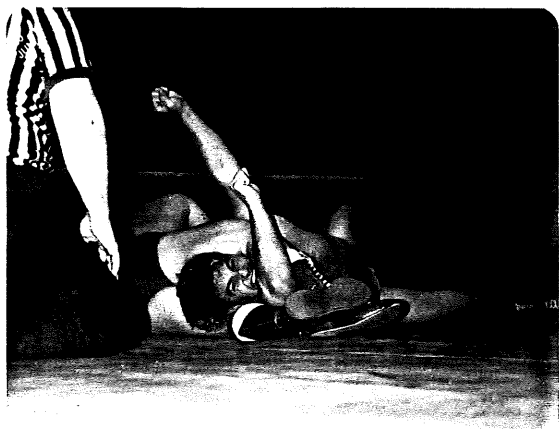
WADE KELLER:

Many visions remain in my mind about Adrian Adonis. I will always remember his match against Curt Hennig in St. Paul when Hennig was just starting off. Curt's father was at ringside. Adonis claimed that he could beat Curt in ten minutes or less or he would forfeit the bout. Well, Adonis didn't beat the young Hennig in the allotted time and he and partner Jesse Ventura raised quite a fit.

I will also remember more recently on a Saturday's Night Main Event when Adonis was wrestling in his nightgown-like outfit. The slow motion picture of Roddy Piper swinging his crutch into Adonis' arm and Adonis' reaction will stick in my mind for a long time. I don't know why. Maybe it was the picture of what an unfortunate turn Adonis' career had taken and the terrible direction his body and wrestling skill had also taken.

My favorite TV scene was when Adonis and Murdoch were walking the streets of New York with Mean Gene. They walked up to real people on the street and put together one of the all-time classic skits in all of wrestling history. I didn't see it on its original run, but when I saw it on video tape about a year ago, I realized what a truly unique and amazing talent Adrian Adonis was outside the ring.

It is too bad he will go down in most people's minds as a degrading homosexual named "Adorable Adrian". Hopefully most fans will realize he was simply the victim of the pressures



ADRIAN ADONIS BEING HEAD SCISSORED

of professional wrestling, and did what he did for the sake of his family.

Adonis is a bonafide legend and should be remembered as such.

JOHN LANIGAN:

My fondest remembrance of Adrian Adonis happened in June 1986 at the Pittsburgh Civic Arena. Bruno Sammartino was wrestling Randy Savage and Adrian came up to ringside waiting to interfere on behalf of Savage. I stood up in my first row seat and snapped Adrian's picture. He went over to me and started swatting me with his towel. The security guards started laughing and yelled, "Go ahead Adrian! Hit him again! We'll back you up and say he started it!" It was hilarious.

Readers' Memories of Bruiser Brody:

GEORGE SHIRE:

In following the sport of wrestling for over thirty years as a writer, broadcaster, and most importantly as a fan, one of my all-time favorites was Bruiser Brody! In wrestling you hear wrestlers shouting and screaming all the time about what they will do to an opponent. This battle for Brody was a private one and whomever stabbed the big man to death removed from wrestling one of the greatest brawlers the business has ever seen. His real name was Frank Goodish and after a stint with the Washington Redskins' football organization he decided he wanted the one on one combat offered by wrestling. He began in the mid-seventies under his real name and quickly hooked up with Stan Hansen. To say they were wild would be an understatement; there has never been a team more devastating...not even The Road Warriors. Soon after, Frank became "Bruiser" Brody and went to every major promotion and all the leading independents in the business and left battered opponents along the way. Brody never lost a match along the way, but he lost the last one--a private war in a dressing room. Who did it? Why? Only Brody knows for sure. I'll miss him and so will thousands and thousands of fans around the world.

JOHN LANIGAN:

I only saw Brody once live. Fortunately it was this year in May in Warren, Ohio. He beat up a very green Abdullah the Butcher-type. Brody really could put fear in your eyes with his performance of an uncontrollable wildman. I can see why most fans held him in awe.

MR. MIKE:

The shock of unexpected deaths has become all too common in pro wrestling these past few years, and none are received lightly. Upon hearing of the senseless, criminal demise of Bruiser Brody however, the sense of deep personal loss was for the first time keenly felt. Few wrestlers have touched the ardent fan as the amazing BB did, and the closer one followed the furry booted behemoth, both in and out of the ring, the more the admiration turned to awe. Brody was a key reason for developing interest of seriously following professional wrestling. Even moreso in maintaining our interest these past recent chaotic years, and his absence will forever change how we will continue. He'll forever remain in our hearts and on our videotapes. For these reasons, thankfully, the barking will never be stopped. Goodbye.

RAY WHEBBE:

To live forty-two strong years may be better than to live eighty-four mediocre years. Bruiser Brody showed us all to live life to its fullest.

Some people chose politicians or missionaries as heroes. I chose Frank Brody. On screen he was the best ever. Off screen he was warm, humble, and gracious. While many may say

JFK or Martin Luther King were heroes as they died for the cause. So did Brody. He was willing to accept the consequences for being a pioneer, honest, and taking no bunk. Nowadays heroes are hard to find. Forever Bruiser Brody will be a personal hero of mine. I pray the Brody spirit in all of us never dies.

WADE KELLER:

Whenever I think of Bruiser Brody, I think of his famous line, "I work for the Sheik", as he looks down at an intimidated Ken Resnick, "And he pays me lots-o-money!!!".

I will always remember his interview when he was hyping his upcoming match against Jim Brunzell and Tony Atlas (That's how respected he was. One top babyface wasn't enough for him at one time). He did a classic interview, where every time he mentioned Tony Atlas, he would put his arms up and flex his meaty arms and spin around, imitating a bodybuilder, namely Tony Atlas. Then he would say "Jumpin' Jumpin' Jim" and hop up and down. He took his opponents so lightly and came off as so tough.

I will also always remember Mr. Mike's drawing of Bruiser Brody where the caption said, "I work for The Sheik, and he tells me to read."

The barking will live on forever.



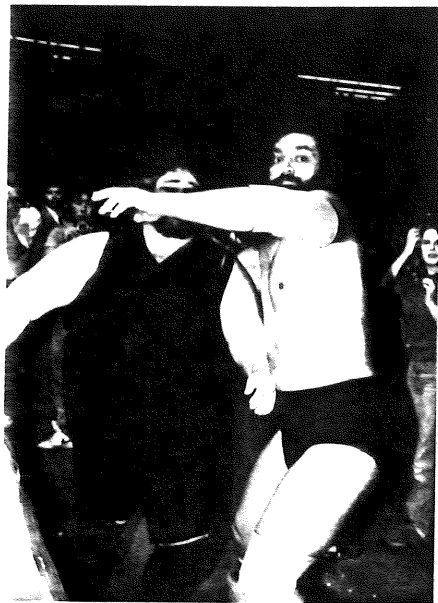
BRODY VS. BLACKWELL

STEVE GENNARELLI:

Living on the East Coast and not an active trader, I saw little of the great Bruiser Brody. I remember his tenure here vs. Bruno in 1976. I do remember watching Brody teaming with Hansen at this time and to this day they were the most imposing and intimidating team I've ever seen. Frank will be sorely missed.



BRODY VS. BLACKWELL



BRODY VS. BLACKWELL

MICK KARCH:

No sooner did we get over the shock of Adrian Adonis' death, but from a personal standpoint, the murder of Bruiser Frank Brody is the most devastating and tragic in recent memory.

The greatest thrill I've had in almost thirty years of following and then being involved in pro wrestling, was interviewing Bruiser Brody for Winnipeg television.

I was petrified at the prospects of it prior to the card, but when I approached him, he put me at ease and made me feel comfortable--a part of the business--not a "mark". And after the conclusion of the interview, when Brody thanked me and told me it was a job well-done, I knew I had arrived in the broadcast end of the business.

The one thing I remembered him telling me before the interview was, "You be sure and interrupt me any time you want--don't let me ramble on, because if I do a monologue, then I'm just like any other guy in the business--and you know Bruiser Brody is not just any wrestler."

That says it all.

STEPHEN MEYERSON:

How can I forget Bruiser Brody who gave me my first "fan bump".

It was February 1987 in Tampa, Florida. The main event matched Kevin Sullivan (booker) with Bruiser Brody (guest star).

Brody and Sullivan took the match into the crowd about fifty feet from the ring.

As Brody ran back toward the ring, I was standing on my chair in the second row at ringside. Brody lightly pushed my stomach with his right hand forcing me to jump off my chair. I was not hurt.

A Reader's Tribute To Dave McKigney:

WES MAIDMENT:

Canadian Promoter and Wrestler Dave McKigney has died as a result of single car crash while on an eastern Canadian tour.

McKigney was better known as the Canadian Wildman, the Bearman, and as he was billed in the 60's, Gene Dubois. The Wildman and his Big Bear promotion was a staple on the Ontario summer wrestling scene as over the last twenty years he wrestled and promoted in every town that had an arena. He had many stars work for him and the list includes Larry Zbyszko, George Steele, Randy Poffo (Savage) and brother Lanny and father Angelo, Bobby Heenan, Angelo Mosca, Kevin Sullivan, and Mark Lewin.

Dave's real fame came from his wrestling bear whom always brought out the curious to his shows. And other gimmick attractions were the lady and midget wrestlers.

Most fans would agree that his shows weren't the flashiest but they provided mat action for the starved fans in the country who couldn't get to see the big shows in the major cities. His bright red posters were a sight for sore eyes for fans in the small towns every summer.

However, in the last few years his problems with the O.A.C. and Jack (WWF) Tunney saw him put on less shows in SW Ontario than ever before, culminating in his east coast tour this summer rather than the more lucrative Ontario market. I personally feel that if Mr. Tunney hadn't put the pressure on the O.A.C to shut Big Bear down in Ontario he would still be here today.

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ANGELO MOSCA JR.
JOEY WAR
EAGLE
THE SHEIK
 VS
RICKY JOHNSON
'MIDGETS'
MR. T VS CASSIDY
PLUS SWEET DADDY
SIKL. 4 MORE
BIG BEN
 SEE GENTLE BEN
 THE WRESTLING BEAR
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 ALL STAR
BIG DOMINION HOLIDAY CARD
2 STEEL CAGE MATCHES 2
DESTROYERS 1 AND 2
BO BO BRAZIL AND TIGER SINGH
CRAZY CHRIS COLT
JOHNEY VALIANT
GIRL WRESTLERS
SHEIK
GENTLE BEN
MARTINEZ
SCARBOROUGH ARENA GARDENS
SUN. 3 JULY

His lifestyle and persona were recently chronicled in a book "Drawing Heat" by London Professor Jim Freedman. Dave's problems are well versed by the completion of the book. At least someone like Mr. Freedman took interest in this Canadian Promoter and Wrestler and told his story in print never to be forgotten by many of us, including myself. So long Dave, we really enjoyed your style! ***



1988

THE YEAR ACCORDING TO POTSHOT

1988 ACCORDING 2 POTSHOT
By Potshot (Bill Runkel)

It was a heck of a year in wrestling. Obviously, the deaths of Brody and Adonis dominated the news, along with the on-again-off-again sale of the NWA, and the first prime time network wrestling special in over three decades.

But that's not what we're here to talk about. We're here to find out what your truly -- the man designated a "heel letter writer" by members of the Dave Meltzer Peanut Gallery -- enjoyed and despised during wrestling year 1988 (which runs from Thanksgiving of the previous year to the following Survivor Series).

Wrestler of the Year

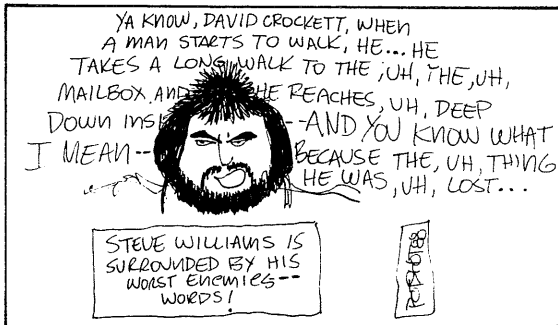
I can't believe anybody but Ted DiBiase is seriously being discussed in this category. Here's a guy who has been universally recognized as one of the ten best in the world for years but has never held a meaningful singles title.

In 1988 he came to Titan where he was given a McMahon Dream Gimmick and finally became the superstar he always should have been. Similarly, he turned his wrestling prowess up another notch having classic matches with Savage and Hogan (the Hogan-DiBiase stuff has been absolutely incredible.) He's in the best shape of his life, has a super gimmick, and even got to hold the belt briefly.

Best Mic Work

Cornette is classic, but the best stick work by a wrestler this year has come from Ric Flair. He has to stand out there week after week, doing 3, 4, or 5 minute segments frequently with no real angle to wrap it around. Expresses athletic class better than anyone else in the biz.

Honorable Mentions: Hulk Hogan (whether or not you like this style interview, Hogan does them better than anyone on a week-in/week-out basis); Ron Bass (can't wrestle and won't work, but he sure goes all out with the mic in his paw; sometimes I think his head will explode); Arn Anderson (gritty, realistic quality); Hawk.



Best Unknown Promotion

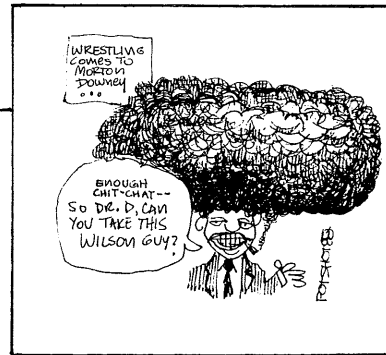
When the smart guys find out about the PWI (Chicago Championship Wrestling), the tapes could be hotter than Windy City's. The Reynolds Bros (The Red White & Blue Wrestling Crew) are classic brawling babyfaces and The Zebra/Tony "The Razor" DeVito is a great jr. heavy heel team. Good, old-fashioned wrestling action from kids who love what they're doing, take some crazy bumps, and try every hot move in the biz.

Most Improved Wrestling

Not much in this category but I've loved following the progress of Young Stallion Paul Roma, who has started dropping my cynical jaw with his moves lately, like a standing jump from the floor onto the ring apron. Then there's the one where he does a standing leap in the corner, kicks off the top turnbuckle and turns into a flying bodypress!

The Sun-Will-Come-Up-Tomorrow Award

To Ted Turnover, for talking the grand old NWA from the incompetent clutches of the Mid-Atlantic cartel and at least trying to bring back Rick Steamboat.



Worst Mic Work

Look, it's Steve Williams and we all know it, so let's cut the phoney uncertainty, okay? A simple declarative sentence is like a hayride through a minefield for this guy. His oblique references to super inside stuff that even Meltzer hasn't told us about (remember the one about the trip to the mailbox?) make Kevin Sullivan sound like Plain Speaking.

If I were Oklahoma State, I'd retroactively flunk this character; would you want anything to do with a school that would give a diploma to Dr. Death?

Honorable Mention: Brutis Beefcake.

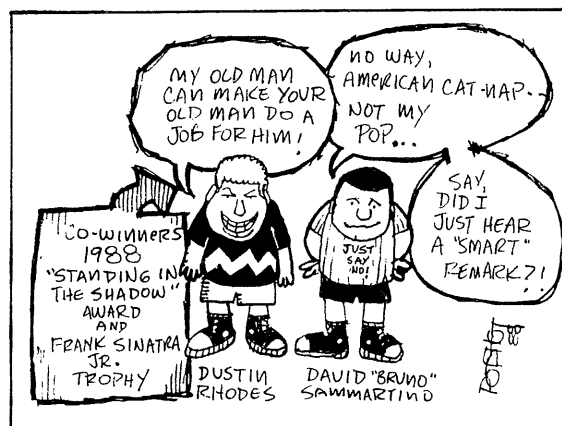
Nightmare Broadcast Team of the Year

Rod Trongard (who looks like he's wearing Buddy Roberts' old freight wig), Lord Al Hayes (who starts to sound like Gordon Solie in this company) and Superstar Billy Graham doing the MSG.

Honorable Mention: Bob Luce and Moose Cholak (on that show from Chicago where they show clips from the 70's).

Most Tasteless Angle of the Year

The One Muslim Gang/Akeem thing was just the last straw from a promotion whose idea of a black face is Koko B. Ware doing Michael Jackson on steroids.



The Do-They-Have-Pictures-Of-Someone? Award

Lots of good candidates: Dino Bravo, Mr. Fuji, and Dangerous Danny Davis (who can't even take a decent bump anymore and looks in awful shape) all come to mind, but let's face facts: Dusty Rhodes takes this one, in perpetuity.

Best Lines of the Year

I've sure I've forgotten many, but I liked Cornette's one about Arn & Tully as "the guys who'd rather switch than fight!" And Monsoon's comment about the Absolute Debacle ("I wonder how much it costs to maintain a body like that?") Funniest was Dave Crockett's claim that Bash PPV would "definitely set an all-time ratings record!"

Angle of the Year

To Akira Maeda, for convincing a nation of so-called "smart fans" that his non-high spot style of wrestling was "real". Even PT Barnum would've been impressed by the success of the UWF.

Best Manager

Cornette's been great with the stick, but Paul E. Dangerously has been a better heel this year. I give him the nod for his work on PWTW.

Worst Manager

I never hear him mentioned but I don't think even Mr. Fuji can touch Frenchy Martin's atrocious work this year. Here's a guy who was actually pretty funny doing a Piper's Pit-type segment on the WWF Spanish broadcast, but he is totally at sea as a new manager. Honorable Mention: The Dukes (from ICW)

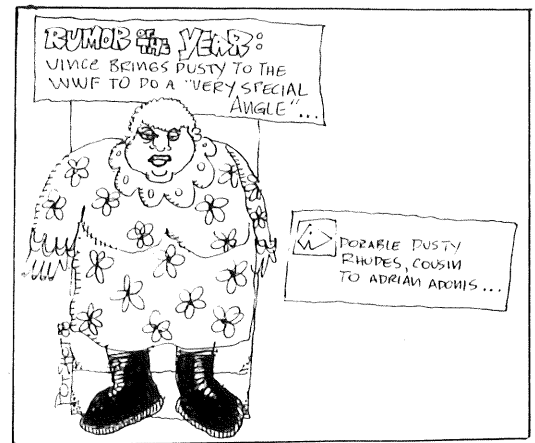
Most Mis-Used

Considering his talent, I'm going to go with Koko B. Ware, who has worlds of talent and deserves better than doing semi-squashes with Big Bubberman. This kid could get over in a graveyard and even turns the normally brain-dead WWF crowds on, but he needs an angle more compelling than having his bird stolen and can't do jobs for people like Bobby Heenan and still get respect from the marks, who see him as a glorified jobber.

The Major League of Pro Wrestling Award

To the only promotion that doesn't claim to be (because it doesn't have to): The World Wrestling Federation.

That about kicks it in the head for this time -- see you all next year, same time, same newsletter! ***



Bill Kunkel's POTSHOT

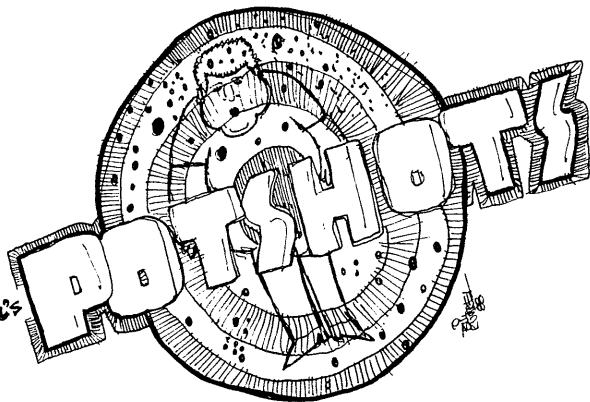
Just days before deadline, Bill Kunkel sent the following masterpiece to me. After reading over it, it immediately was added to the yearbook layout. It's called "The Ballad of Yatsu Fatso" and it's a mini-strip (a series of panels and short strips that are part of a larger storyline). Yatsu is sarcastically based on Akira Maeda and the Japanese shooter scene.

If you're not familiar with Akira Maeda or the "UWF" in Japan, it is a wrestling group in Japan that treats pro wrestling as a legitimate sport. Although the UWF wrestling is really no more real than All-Japan, New-Japan, or the NWA, the fans and the press treat as a legitimate sport such as kick-boxing. Akira Maeda started the UWF again this year in Japan. He had been involved with the original UWF a few years ago, but that went defunct. His new UWF has sold out arenas minutes after tickets have been put on sale. This came with no television exposure. It has a cult following in Japan and is very successful. The style is a lot different in that it focuses on submission holds rather than high spots. A lot of people find it boring in that it doesn't focus on flashy acrobatic moves. Akira Maeda tries to get participants from other sports and other countries to wrestle him in main events against him. In any case, Akira Maeda has turned into a living legend in Japan and is the number one man in the UWF. (Source: The Wrestling Observer Newsletter).

Now on to the mini-strip, "The Ballad of Yatsu Fatso" by "Potshot" Bill Kunkel...



Bill Kunkel's



(continued from previous page)

II.

I AM YATSU FATSO--THE
SHOOTIST!
WORLD FAMOUS IN JAPAN!

THE BALLAD
OF
**YATSU
FATSO**
PART 2



I COULD ALSO
DOMINATE USA
WRESTLING, BUT
COWARDLY YANKEES
WILL NOT COMBAT
WITH THE SHOOTIST,
BECAUSE THEY FEAR
MY SHOOTIST KICKS!
HA! THE WEAKLINGS!

III.

The
Ballad
of
Yatsu
Fatso

by
Potsht

©1988 Bill Kunkel



THIS IS MY #1 IDOL,
HON. SHOOTIST, YATSU
FATSO. I SAW HIM AT
BUDDAKANI AND HE THREW
SHOOTIST KICKS AT OPPONENT,
RING ANNOUNCER AND TWO
FANS WHO CAST DOUBT ON HIS
AUTHENTICITY...



HE ONCE KICKED
RUSHER KIMURA
IN BACK OF HEAD--
AND RUSHER WAS HON.
SHOOTIST'S TAGTEAM
PARTNER!

AS MY KNOWLEDGE OF
WRESTLING GROWS, I
BECAME MORE INTERESTED
IN ~~REAL~~ WRESTLERS...



HON.
SHOOTIST IS
ICHIBAN!

IV

THE BALLAD OF
YATSU FATSO

PART 4

SO, ARUKI, MY
MINIONS INFORM
ME THAT YOU
REFUSE TO DO
JOB FOR
HONORABLE
SELF AT
ANNUAL
ANCESTOR
WORSHIP
FESTIVAL...



THAT IS CORRECT,
YATSU...
YOUR TREACHEROUS
BEHAVIOR IN PAST
MAKES EVEN
THOSE OF
US WHO FELT
WE WERE
YOUR FRIENDS
RELUCTANT TO
WORK WITH YOU.



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GREEN!
THE SHOOTIST IS ENRAGED!



AND SO
MY LEGEND CLAIMS
ANOTHER VICTIM...



V

PART 5

The
Ballad
of
Yatsu
Fatso

JAPANESE WRESTLING
WORLD STILL AGOG
OVER NEW PROMOTION
"GWF"--GENUINE WRESTLING
FEDERATION!



SHOOTIST YATSU
FATSO WILL FACE
AMERICAN SPORTS
LEGEND NOLAN RYAN
IN A MIXED
MATCH AT
NEXT BIG
CARD...



HE HAS ALSO
CHALLENGED
MARTINA NAVRATLOVA,
BUT IT IS FELT SHE WILL
NOT HAVE COURAGE TO
ACCEPT!



VI

THE BALLAD OF YATSU FATSU

PART 6

SO, TO WHOM GOES THE HONOR OF TEAMING WITH GREAT SHOOTIST ON SESU HIAKAWA FESTIVAL SHOW?

FORGET IT, SHOOTIST!

YES! YOU HAVE BETRAYED LAST SIX PARTNERS FOR CHEAP HEAT AND TO BUILD UP YOUR PHONY REPUTATION!

A LEGEND IS SOMETIMES WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN TIME!

HON. CONTEMPORARY, DUSTY DREAM-SAN HAS OFTEN EXPLAINED THIS TO ME...



©1988 BILL KUNKER

VII

AND SO NOW NONE OF MY COUNTRYMEN WILL MEET ME AT BIG ANCESTOR WORSHIP FESTIVAL CARD...

I AM NOW FORCED TO ENGAGE STAN HANSEN-SAN, AMERICAN COWBOY.

I WONDER HOW HE WILL FEEL ABOUT MY SHOOTIST KICKS?

THE BALLAD OF YATSU FATSO PART 7

VIII

THE BALLAD OF YATSU FATSO

by POTSHOT CONCLUSION PART 8

HORROR OF HORRORS! TERRIBLE TRAGEDY! HON. SHOOTIST YATSU FATSU WAS WRESTLING AMERICAN FIREBRAND STAN HANSEN...

HANSEN-SAN HAD ALL BUT REDUCED GREAT SHOOTIST TO POOH-POOH PLATTER AND CROWD BEGAN TO MAKE FAMOUS CHANT...

"FAT-SO! FAT-SO!"

UNHAPPILY, HON. HANSEN TOOK THIS AS A CRITICISM OF HIS PHYSIQUE AND BECAME ENRAGED!

HE GRABBED SIXGUN HE HAS BEEN WEARING INTO RING AND CHALLENGED FATSO: "SHOOTIST, HUH? I'LL SHOW YOU SHOOTIST!"

AND HE SHOT HIM!

HANSEN-SAN IS NOW MOST POPULAR WRESTLER IN JAPANESE HISTORY!

FANS CALL HIM "REAL SHOOTIST"! HANSEN-SAN IS ICHIBAN!

©1988 BILL KUNKER

Interview with Wrestling Observer's DAVE MELTZER

Dave Meltzer has gone from being simply an "underground newsletter" editor and publisher to the most authoritative voice on pro wrestling today. He publishes The Wrestling Observer Newsletter, the king of all current newsletters. He has appeared on Entertainment Tonight and has done radio shows across the country on pro wrestling. Recently Ray Whebbe tracked down this wrestling expert and interviewed him. The following is that interview where Dave talks about his newsletter, himself, and the business of pro wrestling.

If you don't currently get his newsletter you can send \$5.00 for four weekly issues to The Wrestling Observer Newsletter; P.O. Box 1228; Campbell, CA 95009-1228. It's a great source for wrestling news and reader opinion.

KAFABING WITH THE KAFABE SHEET KING A Personal Look At The Wrestling Observer's Dave Meltzer

RAY WHEBBE: HOW DID THE OBSERVER BEGIN?

DAVE MELTZER: The Observer began in 1983 with about ten or fifteen subscribers. I was trading videos and results and it was easier to do a newsletter than write ten or fifteen letters.

WHEBBE: BUT YOU WERE A NOTED WRESTLING JOURNALIST BEFORE THAT, RIGHT?

MELTZER: I wrote The California Wrestling Report in 1973 and from '72 to '75' I did The International Wrestling Gazette. I was a junior in high school when I started The Gazette. I also did a few pieces for Norman Kietzer's publications.

WHEBBE: WHEN DID THE OBSERVER PICK UP?

MELTZER: It exploded in 1985. With the wrestling wars on, people within the business began to read it. When I first went to Japan a lot of wrestlers told me they saw it. I began to get a lot of contacts then more and more contacts followed. I started with fifteen subscribers and now I have 2600.

WHEBBE: THE GROWTH OF THE OBSERVER HAS BEEN PHENOMENAL. THE WARS REALLY DID HELP, EH?

MELTZER: Definitely. Nobody else was covering what was going on. The magazines were two or six months old and really didn't know how to cover the wars. They touched on it, but were afraid to reveal what was happening. The newsletters were the only ones covering the issues which marked the beginning of the newsletter era. Now there are over 28 newsletters. Newspapers don't know how to do it and ignore wrestling. It's always been ignored and it's easy to keep ignoring it.

WHEBBE: AND THE OBSERVER HAS 2600 SUBSCRIBERS. THAT'S QUITE A LOT TO BE PROUD OF, DAVE.

MELTZER: Thanks, but it's still growing. I don't think The Observer has reached its full potential. But I am really happy with the way it is now.

WHEBBE: WERE YOU AT FIRST AFRAID OF WRESTLERS OR THE PUBLIC? I MEAN, WHAT YOU WERE DOING WAS CONSIDERED TO BE TABOO BY THE OLD GUARD.

MELTZER: I kept out of the public eye at first, but now I'm okay with it. I can't hide from it. I took dozens of pictures at the recent convention, have been interviewed on TV and am quoted on in magazines.

WHEBBE: WRESTLERS, THOUGH, SEEM TO HAVE MIXED OPINIONS ON THE OBSERVER. OLDER GUYS SEEM TO HATE IT AND YOUNGER GUYS APPLAUD IT.

MELTZER: There's some truth to that. A lot of the wrestlers saw it around from the beginning of their careers. But others see it as an intrusion. I also see it as an actor may look at a critic. Most actors hate critics a lot. Then again, I don't believe too many wrestlers really hate The Observer now. Promoters don't seem to like it though. They all think I'm especially picking on them. I try to be honest and really believe I'm fair though.

WHEBBE: THOUGH YOU COULD BE CRITICIZED FOR BEING TOO HARSH AT TIMES.

MELTZER: I've always had a real strong writing style, Ray. I try to understand the demands of being a wrestler and try to portray it. I truly don't write anything I don't believe. I see wrestling as a good form of entertainment. So is TV, but there are good and bad TV shows and if you're part of that industry, you'd take criticism too.

WHEBBE: AGREED, DAVE, BUT AT TIMES YOU SEEM TO BE MAD AT WRESTLING, YET IN PERSON YOU'RE THE OPPOSITE.

MELTZER: I've heard others say that, but I love wrestling and it truly can be great entertainment. I may come across stronger as a writer. I don't mean to hurt anyone and I don't just do it for a reaction. One of the strong points of The Observer is I mean what I say. Then again, everyone's wrong sometimes.

To say I don't like the business is silly. I like to see the business thrive. They'd be more work for more people. What I'd hope the NWA for example would do is look at what The Observer says and try to correct what we say that is true. They should take a long look at the criticism and not just write off The Observer in anger.

WHEBBE: 'MAKES A LOT OF SENSE TO ME, DAVE. NO OTHER BUSINESS CAN HAVE A CONSULTANT FOR FIVE DOLLARS A MONTH. IS THE OBSERVER A VOICE OF THE PEOPLE OR IS THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE THE OBSERVER.'

MELTZER: Good question. I believe some people like my opinion. The reader gets my perception of the news and may like that. I believe though that I do shape some people's opinions with the newsletter. I hope my readers don't just believe or disbelieve what I write, but form their own opinions. I also hope they say, Dave does have some knowledge, though not blindly agree.

WHEBBE: THROUGH THE OBSERVER YOU CERTAINLY SHAPED MANY PEOPLE'S VIEW OF OWEN HART.

MELTZER: Sure, but my opinions are formed and shaped by the information I get from people I talk to regularly, like many friends and wrestlers. My friends are the ones who get me to start paying attention to Owen Hart. Therefore, my opinions are collections of others. In fact, they were the ones who convinced me to rate him in the top ten in his rookie year.

WHEBBE: SO, THE OBSERVER MAY HAVE HELPED HIM GET TO THE WWF QUICKER THAN HAD THERE BEEN NO OBSERVER.

MELTZER: Maybe. But it also brought him a lot of resentment. When Owen Hart went to the WWF he went in as kind of a first round draft choice.

WHEBBE: THERE ARE ABOUT 12,000,000 PEOPLE WHO WATCH WRESTLING EACH WEEK...

MELTZER: I think more, Ray.

WHEBBE: YET, NOWHERE OTHER THAN NEWSLETTERS CAN FANS GET REAL NEWS.

MELTZER: Everyone's been kept rather ignorant which allowed certain people to take advantage of some people. Wrestling was ruled by a lot of bullshit. Therefore, the voice of The Observer and newsletters is needed. It's good for a certain portion of fans and wrestlers. The Observer does have an influence on wrestling which I believe is positive.

WHEBBE: THEREFORE, WHEN PEOPLE LIKE SCANDAR AKBAR SAY "KAFABE SHEETS" ARE RUINING THE BUSINESS, YOU DON'T AGREE.

MELTZER: Right. Observer fans love the business. They will travel all over to see matches, buy first row tickets, and love it. To say they hurt the business is preposterous. If anything, it makes them more interested. I even have a lot of writers as readers, but they don't even expose things.

WHEBBE: HOW MANY HOURS A WEEK DO YOU SPEND WATCHING TAPES, RESEARCHING, PHONING, AND PUTTING TOGETHER THE OBSERVER?

MELTZER: Many weeks are eighty hours or more. It's very much a fulltime job. Then again, some weeks I put The Observer together with about twenty-five hours. It could be one-hundred percent time consuming if I let it, but I discipline myself now.

WHEBBE: HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?

MELTZER: Twenty-eight. I was born October 24.

WHEBBE: WERE YOU ALWAYS A CALIFORNIA GUY?

MELTZER: I was originally from New York but have lived in Florida, Texas, and California. I returned to California in 'eighty-four after two years in Texas as a sportswriter.

WHEBBE: ANOTHER CRITICISM OF THE OBSERVER IS YOU COVER JAPAN WRESTLING TOO MUCH. TO THAT WHAT DO YOU SAY?

MELTZER: I cover it now less than before. I try to be more careful now with larger readership. But you can't ignore the importance of Japan wrestling. Many wrestlers earn the bulk of their salaries in Japan. And many wrestlers believe that's where the real wrestling is.

Vince (McMahon Jr.) took a lot of the Japanese ideas on marketing. They were doing the dolls, mugs, and records ten years ago. A lot of workable, innovative concepts start in Japan.

The most fascinating thing in the world of wrestling is the UWF. Although I find it boring at times, its success is phenomenal and it violates everything I ever learned about wrestling promoting. The idea that they are new, have no TV, and sellout in one day is great!

Japanese also deserve a lot of credit for being able to sell the smaller guys. Even in Japan they believe that bigger is better and yet proved smaller guys are marketable. Not everyone in the business needs to be 260 pounds.

WHEBBE: TOO BAD VINCE DOESN'T TRY THE SMALLER GUY PUSH. THERE'S THE TALENT OUT THERE.

MELTZER: Because Vince is a bodybuilder himself, he promotes bigger and he convinces his audience to enjoy muscle guys.

WHEBBE: DO YOU HAVE ANY HOBBIES, DAVE? ARE YOU MARRIED?

MELTZER: I'm a physical fitness freak. I spend a lot of time on the beach and in the gym. In the summer I'm a total beach bum. I'm single now.

WHEBBE: DOES WRESTLING'S BIZARRENESS DRIVE YOU CRAZY?

MELTZER: I don't let the craziness affect my life. Two years ago it was hard. I was putting The Observer together and working as a sportswriter fulltime. Now my release is The Observer. When I'm done I'm cleansed; then I start all over again.

Being in California by my old friends is great for me. I get together with a lot of them who aren't even wrestling fans.

WHEBBE: AND I TAKE IT THE OBSERVER IS A LABOR OF LOVE.

MELTZER: I love what I am doing and feel lucky I fell into a niche and through breaks, some talent, and certain people molding and teaching me, it's all worked.

Nobody's work is perfect though, and I have to keep on improving. One of my faults, too, is accepting criticism, but I'll continue to work on it. And when the day comes I no longer care to improve, I'll get out. ***

(DDT continued from right column)

In tag team championship action they pushed a team which consisted of a guy who looked like Fidel Castro after a lobotomy and a black guy with an accent (from where I don't know).

There have been some good things happening in wrestling this year. In women's wrestling, we had women who actually were good to look at. (Remember Fabulous Moolah, who looked like someone's great-grandmother). Madusa Miceli, an incredible looking lady, led the AWA. Lately she has been challenged by an equally beautiful lady named Magnificent Mimi. The WWF has had Sensational Sherri and Rockin' Robin, both good looking ladies, battling for their top prize.

On the men's side, most of the great happening have been in the NWA. The Barry Windham turn was one of the top events of the year, only to be topped by The Road Warriors' turn on Sting. Coming in a close third place would have to be The Midnight Express turn combined with the attack of The Original Midnight Express on the WTBS show.

Overall, it was a sub-par year in wrestling action. Mostly, the fan has been screwed by the promotions. hopefully, this year will bring a change in the attitudes of the promoters toward the fan. Maybe then we won't feel cheated when we pay to view the matches at the arenas.

That wraps it up for this year in review. Tune in monthly to hear even more of my gripes. Until then, I'm outta here. ***

DDT with Tracy Breeden

D.D.T.: THE YEAR IN REVIEW
by Tracy Breeden

Well, the year has ended, and hopefully this year will be better to the wrestling fans than last year was. I thought I'd go back in time and rehash some of my gripes from last year.

I guess I should start with the top-gun promotion, the WWF. Vince really stuck it to the fans during this past year, taking as much money from them as he could without actually giving them anything. We had the "Royal Rumble", a rip-off idea from the NWA which was an unbelievable waste of time and energy. It was during this farce that Dino Bravo and Jesse Ventura set the world tag team bench press record.

Vince also let Andre the Giant win the WWF World Title in the great referee switch caper, but relinquishing the title some thirty seconds later, when Ted DiBiase bought the title but couldn't keep it. This led to the tournament for the "Undisputed World Wrestling Champion" in which Randy Savage won the title in a disputed match with the help of Hulk Hogan.

The year was filled with a lot of garbage, including letting Andre be a headliner on any card. He also let the Honkeytonk Man (a wrestling joke) become the longest reigning Intercontinental Champion beating out a great like Pedro Morales. If this weren't enough, Vince had the nerve to tarnish the image of the All-American woman, by having Elizabeth yank off her dress to help the Megapowers beat the Megabucks.

Straighten out your act Vince, you've got enough talent to start two or three promotions, yet you insist on letting their talents go to waste and pushing people with talents of a turnip.

Moving on to the NWA, thankfully, Ted Turner has bought the NWA and hopefully, he will be able to save what could be a great organization. Crockett and Rhodes have had their fun this year screwing the fans of the NWA. We've had a year full of the infamous referee bumps in critical matches. Tommy Young took more bumps during the year than all the wrestlers put together. It seemed strange to me that a second referee was always waiting in the wings to rush to the ring and award the match to the face, only to have the first referee come to and change the decision. I wonder why the heels never lost a title match when a referee overruled another ref's decision.

This year in the NWA also gave us the notorious match where Lex Luger won the World Title, but lost it due to a cut that was no worse than what I get shaving. We also had to live through Dusty's pushing himself as a top babyface, giving us the Midnight Rider, the great American hero who rode off into the sunset because no one liked Dusty even when they couldn't see his ugly face. Please Mr. Turner, spare us from the agony of watching Dusty Rhodes make a mockery of wrestling.

Moving on to the independents (I leave the AWA bashing to Mr Mike), we saw the coming and going of USA Wrestling, a good promotion under bad promoters. USA pushed the geriatric has-beens (or never beens), and let the talented younger generation be stuck on the undercard. In the end, the fans stayed home and the promotion sold out.

CWF grew to be almost a major promotion before David Woods (Mr. Know-it-all) threw a wrench into the works and got rid of Eddie Gilbert and all the talent. He turned the reigns of booker over to Bob Armstrong and the promotion has gone down hill ever since. As with the USA promotion, the young talent has been stuck in the prelim matches, so look for CWF to possibly suffer the same fate as USA did sometime in the future.

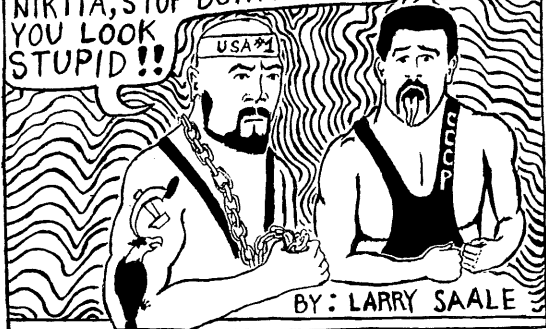
Another promotion which showed bad judgement in the past year was Calgary Stampede Wrestling in Canada. During the past year, Stampede pushed a North American Champion who makes Dusty Rhodes look like a good wrestler (incredible, you say). Makhan Singh looks like one of the whales who got trapped on the ice a few months back. He wrestles like one of the whales would if it were beached somewhere. They also feature an announcer named Ed Whalen who makes Charlie Platt (from CWF) seem to be knowledgeable in wrestling. All this guy cared about was getting into the action. In fact, he mugged for the camera more than Tommy young did during the year.

(DDT concluded on left column)

Parts Unknown
Year In Comics

1988... IVAN KOLOFF TURNS
FACE, AND SEES THE LIGHT!

NIKITA, STOP DOING THAT!
YOU LOOK
STUPID!!



BY: LARRY SAALE

1988... THE TAG TEAM, THE
NIGHTMARES SPLIT UP!

I WAS ONE-HALF
OF THE NIGHTMARES!

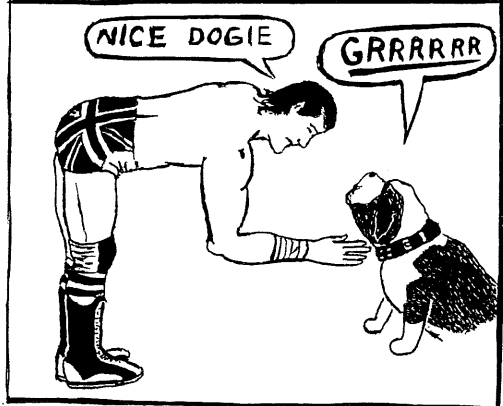
WHICH HALF WERE YOU,
THE FRONT HALF, OR
THE BACK HALF?



1989... MATILDA TURNS HEEL,
THE BRITISH BULLDOGS
LEAVE THE W.W.F. TO
WRESTLE IN CANADA.

NICE DOGIE

GRRRRRR



1988... A MYSTERIOUS MASKED MAN
CALLED THE MIDNIGHT RIDER MADE
A SHORT APPEARANCE IN THE
N.W.A.; THEN RIDES OFF IN A
CLOUD OF DUST.

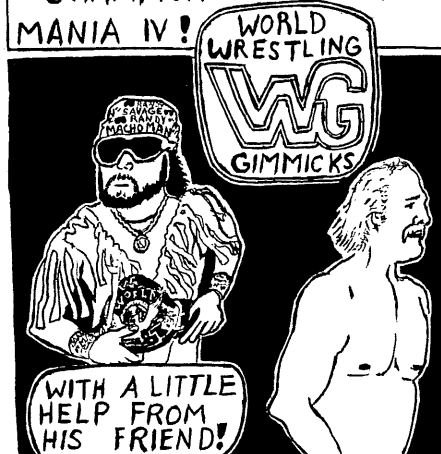
HI HO SILVER, IF YOU
WEEEIIILL!



BY: LARRY SAALE

WHO WAS
THAT MASKED
MAN?

1988... RANDY SAVAGE
BECOMES W F WORLD
CHAMPION AT WRESTLE
MANIA IV!



BY: LARRY SAALE

1989... GARY HART
GROWS HAIR?



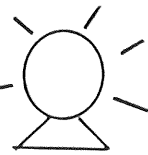
GARY
HART

IF AL PEREZ
TURNS FACE IN
1989, THEN I'LL
GROW HAIR!

BY: LARRY
SAALE

Reader Predictions

For 1989



ELYSE ZOIS'S 1989 AWARDS:

- Harley Race will wrestle Haku for the crown at WM V.
- Superstar Graham will call Lord Alfred Hayes "brother" 1,457,892 times.
- Terry Taylor will get tired of being insulted and will leave the Heenan family.
- Brother Love will be involved in a sex scandal.
- The Iron Sheik will be rehired by the WWF.
- The Iron Sheik will be rehired by the WWF.
- Hulk Hogan's movie will finally escape--I mean be released.
- Madusa Miceli will come to the WWF to manage Mr. Perfect.
- Virgil will demand emancipation.
- Randy Savage will tell Hulk Hogan, "I'm NOT a Hulkamaniac and get your hand off Elizabeth, yeah!"
- Hulk will answer, "Put your belt where your mouth is, brother!"
- One Man Gang/Akeem will undergo another transformation
- to ex-WWF wrestler.
- The Honkeytonk Man will learn how to hold the guitar.
- Nikolai Volkoff will get to finish the Russian national anthem.
- Elizabeth will produce a weight training video called "Lifting with Liz".
- Rod Trongard will slip and call Michaels and Janetty The Midnight Rockers.
- Ted DiBiase will file for bankruptcy.
- Andre the Giant will utter an intelligible sentence. So will Nikita Koloff.
- Bobby Heenan will NOT don wrestling tights.
- The WWF will continue to have "20,000 plus" fans in an arena which holds 19,000.
- Kerry Von Erich will tell Kevin to do his own jobs from now on.
- Koko B. Ware will do an interview segment called "The Bird Cage".
- The New World Atlas will have a listing for Parts Unknown.
- Verne Gagne will have an announcement--next week.
- Joey Marella will change the expression on his face.
- Rod Trongard will set a new record for introducing the announcers.
- Curt Hennig will win the WWF Title.

DAN FARREN'S 1989 PREDICTION:

I can safely say that during the next twelve months some wrestler will receive a trophy... and have it busted over his head.

WALT MARSHALL'S 1989 PREDICTIONS:

- 1) Randy turns heel and fights Savage with Elizabeth at Stake.
 - 2) Hogan will once again be the WWF Champ.
 - 3) Ultimate Warrior will drop the strap to either Mr. Perfect or The Million Dollar Man.
 - 4) Ric Flair will leave the NWA to go to the WWF if Dusty Rhodes is still booker and if Rhodes is not the booker, he will go to the WWF.
- ****I wish these things would happen, but I doubt it...
- 1) Hulk Hogan turns heel
 - 2) Bob Backlund comes back to the WWF as a heel or a babyface.
 - 3) McMahon will tell the world that he is the boss of the WWF.

LINDA KELTNER'S 1989 PREDICTIONS:

- 1) Tommy Rich will join the NWA and feud with Ric Flair in some of the classic bouts of years ago.
- 2) Sunshine will enter as a heel and try to steal Jimmy Garvin back from Precious.
- 3) Sting and Lex will win the titles from The Road Warriors.
- 4) Leaving the NWA will be The Shepherders, JJ Dillon, Ron Simmons, Ric Flair, and possibly Lex Luger.
- 5) Barry Windham and Mike Rotunda will reteam to reform The American Express and feud with Williams and Sullivan.
- 6) The Fantastics will win the US tag belts and hold them for six months.
- 7) New additions to the NWA-The Sawyers, The Von Erichs, Jake Roberts, Rick Steamboat, and Roddy Piper.
- 8) Jim Ross will opening praise the rulebreakers, breaking the code of impartiality.

STEVE GENNARELLI'S 1989 PREDICTIONS:

What I Wished Would Happen in 89... I'd like to see Bill Watts and Bruno Sammartino return to important roles in wrestling. I doubt this will happen unless an outsider comes with a big money desire to enter wrestling. A mogul like Merv Griffin could easily develop and distribute a quality

pro wrestling venture. Neither Watts nor Bruno will end with any of the existing leagues in 1989.

I'd like to see an end to the Titan policy of in-studio announcing. McMahon, Ventura, and company should again travel to the live sites and announce. The in-studio dialogue is so stale and contrived. The sound mixing is poor and cheapens the product. The "Superstars" show and the "SNME's" sound like Vince and Jesse are announcing out of big cardboard boxes. This will not change in 89. McMahon probably considers the economic values of doing everything in the studio more imperative than the improvements in quality. The way it is now, I'd rather hear Shaun Mooney and Lord Al Hayes on a house show than Vince and Jesse so overstated in the studio. The fresh live Jesse you heard so sharp at "Survivor Series" was head and shoulders above the more contrived Jess we hear each week.

I'd enjoy seeing your own Nick Bockwinkel doing heel commentary for Titan in 89. He'd be a solid third chair on the tedious "Prime Time Wrestling". This won't happen.

It would be fun to see FNN/Score attempt a weekly pro wrestling call-in shows as has been rumored in The Observer. For serious fans it would become the most popular series.

Predictions: What will likely happen

A Savage-Curt Hennig feud with Curt bringing in Medusa Miceli as "Wrestling's First Lady" would be a hit-but the big heel turn is coming so forget it...

The Savage-Hogan bout will make Wrestlemania V every bit as much the success that Andre-Hogan was at The Silverdome... Fans will be pro-Hogan, but Randy will keep many fans. "The Battle For Elizabeth" will be the PPV hit of 89...

The NWA will improve and Dusty Rhodes will leave in early 89. He will join Titan in a lucrative role in July...

89 will be the last active year for Andre the Giant who will then turn his attention to acting full time. Also retiring will be Harley Race...

PPV sales and TV ratings will generally remain low due to oversaturation and overall stale product though in reality Titan-Turner wrestling will be superior in 89...

Bob Backlund will appear for independents in the east again in 89 but won't desire a role with any US office...

The Heenan-Monsoon "Prime Time" will be revamped into a new version of TNT. McMahon and Hayes will host...

The WWF's Summer PPV Event will be headlined by the first rematch pitting ex-champ Savage vs. Hogan-July 89...

ED VARNER'S 1989 PREDICTIONS:

AWA: 1) Stanley Blackburn will strip the belt from newly crowned champ Kerry Von Erich for not having both of his feet on the ground.

2) On April 23 in Las Vegas all wrestlers scheduled to appear on that night's card will no-show. It won't matter since there will be no one in attendance.

3) By September the only thing that the AWA acronym will stand for is Auto Workers of America, as Verne will disappear from the ring scene.

WWF: 1) "Dr. D" David Shultz will return using the bounty hunter gimmick. He will be neither face nor heel but will wrestle opponents who have a price on their head.

2) Hulk Hogan will shock inside kayfabe fans by turning heel prior to Wrestlemania V. He will be over as a heel when he Savages Elizabeth. He will tell his Hulkamaniacs to steal money from their parents and send it to him, tells them to swallow their vitamins--the whole bottle!, and to stuff their vegetables under under the couch.

3) Vince will have Akeem bring basketballs and watermelon to the ring to help get the dying gimmick over.

4) In the sickest gimmick of the century, Vince will bring recently acquitted Jose Gonzales in as a super heel named The Executioner, dressed in black with a hood. He will bring an axe to the ring and pin opponents with a slam called The Bruiser. This ugly idea will backfire on McMahon when "The Bounty Hunter" (Shultz) squashed Gonzales in an unscheduled shoot match and collects a bounty offered by Brody fans.

NWA: 1) To help gather a broader audience for his new venture, Ted Turner will hold matches during the seventh inning stretch of Atlanta Brave home games. Also, Cornette and Paul E. Dangerously will replace Patrick Buchanan and Tom Braden as the hosts of CNN's "Crossfire".

2) To cut costs, the players for Turner's Atlanta Hawks and Braves will be used as jobbers in squash matches during their off-season.

TRACY BREEDEN'S 1989 PREDICTION:

Wade asked nicely, so I dug out my crystal ball to see what 1989 would hold for wrestling fans. From the looks of things, it's going to be a strange year.

Starting in the WWF, I see Vince McMahon making several more acquisitions from the other wrestling organizations. First, I see Vince signing Michael Hayes and Terry Gordy,

reuniting them as The Canneries. Coming in to feud with The Canaries will be Jim Cornette's Midnight Express, now known as The Sheepdogs.

Also in the WWF, I see Vince accidentally slipping in slobber after doing an interview with The Bushwackers. Vince will strike his head, knocking his bug eyes back into their sockets. The fall will also cause a bump to rise on his head, actually making his head appear round, instead of square.

Finally, in the WWF, I see tragedy striking, as Hulk Hogan will explode while posing for a crowd. It will be discovered that Hogan's steroid abuse had caused his muscles to swell to ten times their normal size. The explosion will be a blessing to Vince, however, as he will make a fortune selling Hulk pieces to the fans.

Moving to the NWA, I see Dr. Death leaving wrestling to open a pharmacy in Japan. Williams tried this venture once before, but couldn't get his drug supply into the country.

Also in the NWA, Ted Turner will decide that he wants to become a wrestler. Turner will make a miraculous climb to stardom, defeating everyone and winning the World Title only a month after becoming a wrestler.

Finally in the NWA, Lex Luger will star in a movie. Luger will have no speaking lines, but will remove his shirt a minimum of a hundred times.

Moving to the AWA, I see Jerry Lawler being elected Governor of the state of Tennessee. Lawler will defend both the AWA Title and the governorship in his matches.

Kerry Von Erich will turn heel, using a loaded foot to knock opponents unconscious. For opponents with hard heads, Kerry will hold the bottom of his fake foot to the man's nose until he is rendered unconscious.

Finally, in the AWA, the female wrestlers will combine their efforts to make a pornographic movie. Kevin Kelly will return to be the male lead in the movie, which will star Madusa Miceli, Magnificent Mimi, and Wendi Richter.

Moving to home turf, the CWF, the major story will be that Willie B. Hert will receive a mouth transplant. Hert will then be able to speak comprehensible sentences.

Also, The Bullet will become CWF Champion and will hire Dusty Rhodes, Harley Race, and Verne Gagne to be his opponents. The Bullet, Harley, and Verne will come to the ring in wheelchairs, while Dusty will simply lay down and roll to the ring.

Finally, after the foursome drops dead from overwork, Tom Owen will take over the CWF and turn it into a weekly telethon for his King's Ranches. The remaining wrestlers will solicit donations by body slamming people until they give money.

Moving on to a couple of personal predictions. I see myself winning Ed McMahon's ten million dollar prize from his contest.

I will see my cable actually being on more than it's off. They will lower all their customs bills instead of raising them.

Finally, wrapping things up, I see myself being hired as a columnist for the Daily Times. (Damn, my crystal ball must have a loose screw. I'm going to have to take it to the shop and get it fixed).

"POTSHOT" BILL KUNKEL'S 1989 PREDICTIONS:

Hogan will NOT defeat Savage at WM5. They will fight to a draw and establish Savage as a legit champion. Let's look at some background on this angle that looks like it is being run as a modern variation on the classic Bruno vs. Pedro feud. Here are the differences:

- * Bruno and Pedro had no Liz. They didn't even have a good reason to be fighting -- Bruno had accidentally hit tag partner Morales after having talcum powder thrown in his eyes by Mr. Fuji. Also, Bruno did not marry Arnold Skaaland, or anyone else for that matter. Savage doubtless will ("marry" Liz, that is, not Arnold) as a result of WM5. This will be a Chushu/Uncle Elmer ring wedding.

- * Bruno and Pedro didn't fight around the circuit a couple years before their feud as Hogan-Savage have.

- * They didn't run any angles to support the Bruno-Morales feud and the interviews were especially bland, with Bruno playing the slightly confused friend ("I don't know why he's mad at me, doggone it! But if he wants to wrestle, we'll wrestle.") and Pedro the hot-headed-but-no-heel Latin.

Here's where it may be the same:

- * Both may go to a draw with them men shaking hands in the ring at the conclusion;

- * The match stunk;

- * The card was a financial success, due to the interest in seeing these two fight.

Here's why Hogan won't win: He already established that he can beat Randy the Heel. If he can similarly dispatch Randy the Face, Savage is completely discredited. The Macho Man (with Liz) is Vince's #2 attraction and his insurance against Hulkster Failure; he will not throw his insurance policy to the dogs.

A draw means neither man has to do a job, but Savage is elevated to Hoganesque dimensions. Hogan is better without the strap, playing the policeman role, as his feud with Bossman shows.

The final question: How does Hogan stay alive to a time-limit draw? Two answers. 1) Maybe it isn't a time-limit draw and; 2) Don't forget Liz. She will be outside the ring providing a plethora of possibilities for

business, allowing Hogan to recover from blow-ups.

I also predict that Hogan will fight the match of his life. In case you haven't noticed, Hogan is probably at the height of his wrestling powers right now. Even The Observer rated several of his recent matches with DiBiase four stars and with the spotlight of Wrestlemania on him, he will give his all.

JOE LANCELLO'S 1989 PREDICTIONS:

Lanny Poffo will dig out his suit of armor (remember Sir Lanny Poffo from Memphis) and join The Blue Blazer and a newly turned Red Rooster as The White Knight and the three will be called The Rainbow Coalition.

Ron Garvin will try to beat up Hogan in the dressing room at least once.

Someone will wise up and sign Derrick Dukes and Larry Cameron and give them a push.

Backfiring interference from JJ Dillon will cause Ric Flair to turn on JJ and Windham.

Dusty Rhodes will go to Florida. Not to retire, but to take over the FCW.

Johnny Love goes to Stampede and has a tremendous feud with Chris Benoit.

In Memphis, Lawler and Dundee will wrestle Fuller and Golden with this stipulation: If the Stud Stable loses, ten fans will win the right to slap Fuller and Golden in the face. The largest crowd in the history of Memphis turns out for this one. Ticket scalping for the chance to slap Fuller is incredible.

Curt Hennig won't get a shot at the title until Summer Slam.

The Rougeaus will take the tag belts from Demolition at Wrestlemania.

Powers of Pain continue to go over like a lead balloon with manager Fuji.

Akeem finds a new gimmick in the NWA.

Verne Gagne sells to Ed Sharkey.

Eddie Gilbert joins The Horsemen.

KLON'S 1989 PREDICTIONS:

- * Lex Luger will defeat Ric Flair for the World Championship. A clean hard fought battle will end with quick pinfall and Luger's strength will prove the difference. Two days after winning the championship Luger signs an exclusive contract with Precious Paul Ellering and turns into a Rick Rude style heel (subtle hints are there: watch Luger flip his hair during interviews).

- * Flair announces that he's going to take some time off for intensive training to prepare to regain "his" championship. During a world tag battle between The Roadies and Cornette's Express, bedlam breaks loose. Cornette is knocked out, Luger is battling Bobby outside the ring, and Precious Paul is giving The Roadies the signal to break Stan's neck with the same move they used on Sting. Before this can occur, Flair does a run-in to save Stan. He later explains that he gave Stan his start in the business when he was a lifeguard and martial arts student in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and he'll be damned if he's going to let a couple of punks from the wrong side of town destroy Stan's career. Flair and Sweet Stan become everyone's favorite team to battle The Road Warriors.

- * A rift develops between Stan and Bobby over Stan's teaming with Flair so much and during a TV match Bobby and Jim Cornette turn on Stan Lane. The next week Cornette introduces his new Midnight Express, Bobby Eaton and Bret Hart. He is also accompanied by his new bodyguard, Bam Bam Bigelow.

- * Rick Steiner will bring in a new partner to help in his war with Mike Rotunda and Dr. Death. He will keep referring to his partner but for several weeks The Varsity Club keep challenging him to bring his new partner out. On the third challenge out comes Rick Steiner's new partner, Terry Gordy.

- * Road Warrior Animal will suffer a serious injury and be out for months. During this time Hawk becomes a single wrestler and battles Flair in a series of single matches surpassing the Bunkhouse PPV match. Hawk does increasingly sinister interviews. He makes fun of the Jerry Lewis telethon, he makes jokes about the challenger astronauts, and he becomes the most hated man in wrestling. He uses a foreign object on Ron Simmons, knocks him out, and sticks watermelon on Simmons' head. He comments on Africa, AIDS, and colored boys when Simmons proceeds to legit put Hawk into the hospital with broken ribs and a concussion. When a fan stabs Precious Paul trying to get to Hawk, Paul retires. A new manager comes on the scene, a Japanese equivalent of the Million Dollar Man. He purchases and gets The Fantastics whom he re-names Leather and Lace and they do a gay act. All the fans who formerly wanted to shake their hands or get a kiss, miss the old days and wonder if the end is near.

- * George Steele retires and joins the cast of Married with Children as the Bundy's strange Uncle Bert who lives in their oak tree and chases cars. Instead of wrestling tights he wear pajama bottoms all the time and does the same old act. America loves Uncle Bert and the FOX network considers giving Steele his own show.

- * During the WWF live prime time show, Randy Savage throws Vince into the ring and beats the living daylight out of him. He is fired and sued. He admits he is insane over all the things Vince did to his wife and is acquitted. He was never defeated as WWF champion and proceeds into the NWA and destroys Lex Luger to win the title. ***

WF WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION PRESENTS

SURVIVOR SERIES

Live From

RICHFIELD COLISEUM • RICHFIELD, OH • NOVEMBER 24, 1988

THANKSGIVING NIGHT

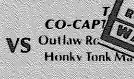
TEAMS OF FIVE STRIVE TO SURVIVE!



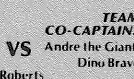
TEAM CO-CAPTAIN
"Macho Man" Randy Savage
Hulk Hogan



TEAM CO-CAPTAINS
Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake
Ultimate Warrior



TEAM CO-CAPTAINS
Hacksaw Jim Duggan
Jake "The Snake" Roberts



TEAM CO-CAPTAINS
Powers of Pain
Demolition

6:30pm (Central) • 9:30pm (Central Replay)

CALL YOUR LOCAL CABLE SYSTEM

THANKSGIVING WEEKEND



SUPER CLASH

SHOWCASE
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 7:30 PM
AT THE MET SPORTS CENTER

A.W.A. HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE MATCH

JERRY "THE KING" LAWLER
vs.
WAHOO McDANIELS

W.C.C.W. HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE MATCH

Champion KERRY VON ERICH
vs.
JIMMY JACK FUNK

SGT. SLAUGHTER
vs.
THE IRON SHIEK

TITLE MATCH BADD COMPANY vs.
ARS INCLUDING: Greg Gagne, A.W.A. Ladies, more.

WORLD GRAND PRIX WRESTLING

HALIFAX FORUM
THURSDAY, JULY 21, 8

TWO BIG MAIN EVENT

RETURN MATCH

INTERNATIONAL HEAVY CHAMPIONSHIP

CHAMPION HUSTLER

RIP ROGERS

VS

CHALLENGER ROCK

ROLL REBEL DINO VEI

SIX MAN TAG TEAM

BULLDOG

BOB BROWN

TOKYO CHONO

SAILOR WHITE

VS

WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION PRESENTS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21 WINNIPEG ARENA 7:30 P.M.

INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPIONSHIP

CHAMPION HONKY TONK MAN

with Peggy Sue & Colonel Jimmy Hart

VS.

CHALLENGER RANDY (Macho Man) SAVAGE

with Miss Elizabeth

WORLD WOMEN'S CHAMPION SENSATIONAL SHERRI

VS.

VELVET MCINTYRE

TAG TEAM ACTION ISLANDERS

VS.

DEMOLITION VS. KEN PATERA & BILLY JACK HAYNES

BRUTUS BEEFCAKE vs GREG "The Hammer" VALENTINE

SAM HOUSTON vs DANGEROUS DANNY DAVIS

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Monday, May 23,



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6 MAN

THE BRITISH BULL DOGS & KOKO B. WANE

VS

THE ISLANDERS & BOBBY "THE BRAIN" HEERMAN

VS

DON MURACO

VS

HAMMER VALENTINE

VS

BAD NEWS BROWN

VS

10 STALLIONS

VS

THE ROUGEAU BROTHERS

VS

IS & ROMA

VS

PRICE: 10 A.M. - 6 P.M. AND

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WISA

OR O.C.

FURNAS

VS

LAWLER

AWA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, July 22-8:30 pm

KNOXVILLE CIVIC COLISEUM

—ALSO—

World Jr. Hwt. Title

NELSON ROYAL, Champion

VS

SCOTT ARMSTRONG

USA Tag Team Championship

DAVEY - JOHN RICH

VS

THE ROCK & ROLL R.P.M.S.

Champions

2 out of 3 falls

Other matches include

RON WRIGHT

STORM TROOPER

VS

TODD MORTON

THE BULLET

MOONDOG

VS

BILL DUNDEE

VS

GUMBY

Ringside: 8:00, Gen. Adm. \$6.00

Child: \$3.00

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Saturday at 1:30 pm on

Channel 6

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VS

BRETT HART

VS

BAD NEWS BROWN

VS

THE ROUGEAU BROTHERS

VS

THE ISLANDERS & BOBBY "THE BRAIN" HEERMAN

VS

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